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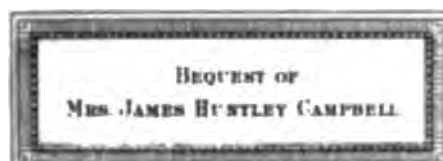
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**EDMOND AND JULES  
DE GONCOURT**

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EDMOND AND JULES  
DE GONCOURT



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*Jules de Goncourt.*  
*from a portrait on Enamel by Claudius Popelin*



EDMOND AND JULES  
GONCOURT

SELECTED AND LEAVES FROM  
THEIR JOURNALS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

J. H. WELLES AND M. CHEDLOCK

With Eight Portraits

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I



LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1895

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## CHAPTER V

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution</i> —Reception of the book by the critics—Letter from Jules de Goncourt to Gavarni—Publication of <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant le Directoire</i> —Letters to Aurélien Scholl—Gavarni's description of Balzac, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Madame Récamier . . . . . | 65   |

## CHAPTER VI

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The de Goncourts' Italian journey—Jules' letters from Venice, Parma, Pisa, and Rome—The brothers' return to Paris—A model mistress described—A visit to Montalembert—Autumn at Gisors—The original of <i>Renée Mauperin</i> —Sophie Arnould—How Thiers spent his evenings as a young man—The gradual loosening of family ties—Théophile Gautier's methods of work, as described by himself . . . . . | 82 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER VII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Year 1857—Publication of <i>Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle</i> —Letters from Jules to Saint-Victor and Gavarni—Various conversations with Flaubert, Feydeau, Gautier, Gavarni— <i>Hommes de Lettres</i> —Death of Gavarni's son Jean—Napoleon the Third's literary labours—Baudelaire—The year 1858—Passages from the diary—Rachel's house described by Jules—Coxs of the <i>Illustrated London News</i> —Jules Lecomte . . . . . | 106 |
|--|-----|

## CHAPTER VIII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Publication of <i>L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette</i> —Michelet's opinion of the book—Gavarniana—Flaubert—Orsini's love of Italy—Description of Alsout—The room in which Napoleon the First planned 18 Brumaire—The de Goncourts' grown . . . . . | 127 |
|--|-----|

## CHAPTER IX

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Gavarniana—The beginnings of <i>Sour Philomène</i> —Flaubert's criticism of Hugo—A letter from George Sand—Letters from Balzac—Seine—A tour through Germany—The true story of the fall of Sebastopol . . . . . | 143 |
|--|-----|

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| The de Goncourt family—Edmond and Jules' grandfather, their uncle, their father and mother—The brothers: birth and youth—Influence of Madame de Courmont on the young men's future life and tastes—Their mother's last illness and death . . . . . | I    |

## CHAPTER II

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The state of Europe in the year 1849—Edmond and Jules' first travels—A walking tour through Burgundy and Provence—First impressions of Algiers—Return to Paris—Art studies and summer holidays . . . . . | 25 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER III

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Literary débuts—First essays in dramatic writing—Country holidays—The de Goncourts' first book, <i>En 18 * *</i> —The Coup d'Etat—A review by Jules Janin—A weekly newspaper—The brothers enter journalism—They make the acquaintance of Gavarni the caricaturist—A letter from Victor Hugo to Janin . . . . . | 37 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Paris</i> , a daily literary paper—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt summoned to appear before the Courts—Their offence—A literary <i>cause-célèbre</i> —The brothers give up their connection with daily journalism—Publication of <i>La Lorette</i> —An autumn holiday—Millet and Jacques—Anecdote . . . . . | 53 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER V

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution</i> —Reception of the book by the critics—Letter from Jules de Goncourt to Gavarni—Publication of <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant le Directoire</i> —Letters to Aurélien Scholl—Gavarni's description of Balzac, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Madame Récamier . . . . . | 65   |

## CHAPTER VI

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The de Goncourts' Italian journey—Jules' letters from Venice, Parma, Pisa, and Rome—The brothers' return to Paris—A model mistress described—A visit to Montalembert—Autumn at Gisors—The original of <i>Renée Mauperin</i> —Sophie Arnould—How Thiers spent his evenings as a young man—The gradual loosening of family ties—Théophile Gautier's methods of work, as described by himself . . . . . | 82 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER VII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Year 1857—Publication of <i>Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle</i> —Letters from Jules to Saint-Victor and Gavarni—Various conversations with Flaubert, Feydeau, Gautier, Gavarni— <i>Hommes de Lettres</i> —Death of Gavarni's son Jean—Napoleon the Third's literary labours—Baudelaire—The year 1858—Passages from the diary—Rachel's house described by Jules—Guys of the <i>Illustrated London News</i> —Jules Lecomte . . . . . | 106 |
|--|-----|

## CHAPTER VIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Publication of <i>L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette</i> —Michelet's opinion of the book—Gavarniana—Flaubert—Orsini's love of Italy—Description of About—The room in which Napoleon the First planned 18 Brumaire—The de Goncourts' groom . . . . . | 127 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER IX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Gavarniana—The beginnings of <i>Sœur Philomène</i> —Flaubert's criticism of Hugo—A letter from George Sand—Letters from Bar-sur-Seine—A tour through Germany—The true story of the fall of Sebastopol . . . . . | 143 |
|---|-----|

## CONTENTS

ix

### CHAPTER X

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Jules compares the Paris of the Past with the Paris of the Present—<br>Studies at the Hospital of La Charité—Henri Mürger's death<br>and funeral—The publication of <i>Sœur Philomène</i> —Flaubert's<br>reading of <i>Salammbô</i> —Letters . . . . . | 163  |

### CHAPTER XI

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| An autumn holiday—The de Goncourts' first impressions of<br>Sainte-Beuve—Year 1862—An evening with Théophile<br>Gautier and his daughters—A visit to George Sand . . . . . | 183 |
|--|-----|

### CHAPTER XII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| The illness and death of Rose, the de Goncourts' old servant—<br>The prototype of "Germinie Lacerteux"—Letters to Paul de<br>Saint-Victor—An evening with the Gautiers . . . . . | 200 |
|--|-----|

### CHAPTER XIII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| A meeting with Sainte-Beuve—Conversation with the author of<br><i>Volupté</i> —The Magny dinners—Publication of <i>La Femme au</i><br><i>XVIII<sup>ième</sup> Siècle</i> —Princess Mathilde Bonaparte—Robespierre<br>as poet—1863—Jules de Goncourt's love of children—Tur-<br>gueniev—A visit to Montalembert—Madame Sand at<br>Nohant—Flaubert's Norman home—A call on M. and Mme.<br>Michelet . . . . . | 207 |
|--|-----|





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## P R E F A C E

THIS book proposes to give an account of the life and work of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, brothers who achieved a rare literary partnership, and who have remained closely associated in the mind and judgment of the public, although the younger of the two has lain in the grave for nearly a quarter of a century.

The diaries of their joint-impressions, having appeared many years after the death of Jules de Goncourt, have kept his memory green and his image living, and in his elder brother's work his name is perpetually revived. The sensitive, vivacious, poetic genius of Jules de Goncourt survives as a permanent influence upon M. Edmond de Goncourt's work.

Their novels and works of historical research have been and are the subjects of constant analysis by all the principal French critics. In the past, Sainte-Beuve, Michelet, Victor Hugo, Flaubert, de Maupassant, and among living writers, Alphonse

Daudet, Paul Bourget, and Zola, have written with the warmest admiration of their fiction, while the "Diaries" appeal to all readers, by the extreme pathos of the brotherly affection which they reveal, and the penetrating observation of life and literature which they record.

M. de Goncourt has kindly given every facility for the use of the diaries and letters. We have also to acknowledge the assistance afforded by M. Delzant's admirable critical and chronological work.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| The de Goncourt family—Edmond and Jules' grandfather, their uncle, their father and mother—The brothers: birth and youth—Influence of Madame de Courmont on the young men's future life and tastes—Their mother's last illness and death . . . . . | I    |

## CHAPTER II

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The state of Europe in the year 1849—Edmond and Jules' first travels—A walking tour through Burgundy and Provence—First impressions of Algiers—Return to Paris—Art studies and summer holidays . . . . . | 25 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER III

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Literary débuts—First essays in dramatic writing—Country holidays—The de Goncourts' first book, <i>En 18 * *</i> —The Coup d'Etat—A review by Jules Janin—A weekly newspaper—The brothers enter journalism—They make the acquaintance of Gavarni the caricaturist—A letter from Victor Hugo to Janin . . . . . | 37 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Paris</i> , a daily literary paper—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt summoned to appear before the Courts—Their offence—A literary <i>cause-célèbre</i> —The brothers give up their connection with daily journalism—Publication of <i>La Lorette</i> —An autumn holiday—Millet and Jacques—Anecdote . . . . . | 53 |
|--|----|



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# CONTENTS

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|  | PAGE |
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| The de Goncourt family—Edmond and Jules' grandfather, their uncle, their father and mother—The brothers: birth and youth—Influence of Madame de Courmont on the young men's future life and tastes—Their mother's last illness and death . . . . . | I    |

## CHAPTER II

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The state of Europe in the year 1849—Edmond and Jules' first travels—A walking tour through Burgundy and Provence—First impressions of Algiers—Return to Paris—Art studies and summer holidays . . . . . | 25 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER III

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Literary débuts—First essays in dramatic writing—Country holidays—The de Goncourts' first book, <i>En 18 * *</i> —The Coup d'Etat—A review by Jules Janin—A weekly newspaper—The brothers enter journalism—They make the acquaintance of Gavarni the caricaturist—A letter from Victor Hugo to Janin . . . . . | 37 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER IV

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>Paris</i> , a daily literary paper—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt summoned to appear before the Courts—Their offence—A literary <i>cause-célèbre</i> —The brothers give up their connection with daily journalism—Publication of <i>La Lorette</i> —An autumn holiday—Millet and Jacques—Anecdote . . . . . | 53 |
|--|----|



## CHAPTER V

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution</i> —Reception of the book by the critics—Letter from Jules de Goncourt to Gavarni—Publication of <i>Histoire de la Société Française pendant le Directoire</i> —Letters to Aurélien Scholl—Gavarni's description of Balzac, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Madame Récamier . . . . . | 65   |

## CHAPTER VI

|  |    |
|--|----|
| The de Goncourts' Italian journey—Jules' letters from Venice, Parma, Pisa, and Rome—The brothers' return to Paris—A model mistress described—A visit to Montalembert—Autumn at Gisors—The original of <i>Renée Maupérin</i> —Sophie Arnould—How Thiers spent his evenings as a young man—The gradual loosening of family ties—Théophile Gautier's methods of work, as described by himself . . . . . | 82 |
|--|----|

## CHAPTER VII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Year 1857—Publication of <i>Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle</i> —Letters from Jules to Saint-Victor and Gavarni—Various conversations with Flaubert, Feydeau, Gautier, Gavarni— <i>Hommes de Lettres</i> —Death of Gavarni's son Jean—Napoleon the Third's literary labours—Baudelaire—The year 1858—Passages from the diary—Rachel's house described by Jules—Guys of the <i>Illustrated London News</i> —Jules Lecomte . . . . . | 106 |
|--|-----|

## CHAPTER VIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Publication of <i>L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette</i> —Michelet's opinion of the book—Gavarniana—Flaubert—Orsini's love of Italy—Description of About—The room in which Napoleon the First planned 18 Brumaire—The de Goncourts' groom . . . . . | 127 |
|---|-----|

## CHAPTER IX

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Gavarniana—The beginnings of <i>Sœur Philomène</i> —Flaubert's criticism of Hugo—A letter from George Sand—Letters from Bar-sur-Seine—A tour through Germany—The true story of the fall of Sebastopol . . . . . | 143 |
|---|-----|

## CONTENTS

ix

### CHAPTER X

|  | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Jules compares the Paris of the Past with the Paris of the Present—<br>Studies at the Hospital of La Charité—Henri Mürger's death<br>and funeral—The publication of <i>Sœur Philomène</i> —Flaubert's<br>reading of <i>Salammbô</i> —Letters . . . . . | 163  |

### CHAPTER XI

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| An autumn holiday—The de Goncourts' first impressions of<br>Sainte-Beuve—Year 1862—An evening with Théophile<br>Gautier and his daughters—A visit to George Sand . . . . | 183 |
|--|-----|

### CHAPTER XII

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| The illness and death of Rose, the de Goncourts' old servant—<br>The prototype of "Germinie Lacerteux"—Letters to Paul de<br>Saint-Victor—An evening with the Gautiers . . . . . | 200 |
|--|-----|

### CHAPTER XIII

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| A meeting with Sainte-Beuve—Conversation with the author of<br><i>l'olupté</i> —The Magny dinners—Publication of <i>La Femme au</i><br><i>XVIII<sup>ième</sup> Siècle</i> —Princess Mathilde Bonaparte—Robespierre<br>as poet—1863—Jules de Goncourt's love of children—Tur-<br>guéniev—A visit to Montalembert—Madame Sand at<br>Nohant—Flaubert's Norman home—A call on M. and Mme.<br>Michelet . . . . . | 207 |
|---|-----|



## PORTRAITS

JULES DE GONCOURT . . . . . *Frontispiece*  
*From a Portrait on Enamel by CLAUDIUS POPELIN.*

JULES DE GONCOURT . . . . . *to face page 112*  
*From a Drawing by EDMOND DE GONCOURT.*

EDMOND DE GONCOURT . . . . . „ „ 152  
*By JULES DE GONCOURT, 1860.*

EDMOND DE GONCOURT . . . . . „ „ 210  
*Bust by LENOIR, 1890.*



only to return once more in 1815, in order to fortify the Vosges for the Emperor, who held him in special esteem. He finally married and settled down to an uneventful country life till 1848, when he was elected to the National Assembly, and died at Neufchateau on the 11th of July 1857.

Capitaine de Goncourt does not seem to have played any part in his nephews' lives. They described him on one occasion as having been somewhat deaf but full of brusque cordiality, hail-fellow-well-met with all, a man eminently suited to country life, and to whom Nature had given such a kindly disposition, that he could not cherish evil feelings even towards his enemies, and this kindliness was as much a part of himself as his courage. As an old man his absorbing interest in life was mathematics, and he used to spend all his spare time walking up and down his garden, his eyes gazing into space. On one occasion he strongly urged the marriage between his granddaughter and a certain suitor, declaring he felt sure she would be happy with him; but when asked to state his reason, his sole ground for that assurance was given in the following phrase: "He explained the barometer to me most thoroughly."

The father of the two writers, Marc Pierre de Goncourt, was born at Bourmont on the 28th June 1787, and entered the military school of Fontainebleau at the age of sixteen, soon passing as sub-lieutenant into the 35th regiment of line infantry. In those days the chances of distinction and promo-



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WITH LETTERS, AND LEAVES FROM THEIR JOURNALS

## CHAPTER I

The de Goncourt Family—Edmond and Jules' Grandfather, their Uncle, their Father and Mother—The Brothers: Birth and Youth—Influence of Madame de Courmont on the young men's future life and tastes—Their Mother's last illness and death.

EDMOND and Jules de Goncourt, the two brothers so indissolubly united in their literary fame, although the younger has been dead for four and twenty years, were the sole surviving children of an officer in the service of the First Empire.

The de Goncourt family became ennobled early in the last century, and Jean Antoine de Goncourt, Jules and Edmond's grandfather, was a well-known country magistrate, and represented Bassigny in the National Assembly both before and after the Revolution. Of him one of the brothers has left a vivid picture: "An old man, from whose toothless mouth constantly issued stuttering oaths, incessantly sucked an unlighted pipe, which he perpetually tried to light with a live coal caught up with a little pair of silver tongs. His stick



was always on the chair beside him, but it had not always lain idle. He had been a sturdy man in his time, and in his castle at Sommérecount, which even now resounded with the echoes of his loud voice . . . he had trained his domestic surroundings by the brute force of his stick, and had succeeded, notwithstanding, in inspiring his household with a certain amount of affection. Old Marie Jeanne, the cook, still treasured among the tender and affectionate memories of her youth, the blows distributed quite impartially to one and another offender, blows merely looked upon as a pleasing familiarity between master and servant, and as an additional tie between them. The old gentleman ruled his family also with a rod of iron, and although his son, Marc Pierre, had the reputation of being one of the wildest officers in the Grande Armée, he used to keep his father's letters nine and ten days in his pocket unopened, so great was his fear of the scolding he felt sure they contained."

Before the Revolution M. Huot de Goncourt had married a certain Mademoiselle Marguerite Rose Diez, a beautiful Creole girl, by whom he had two sons. The elder, Pierre Antoine Victor, born 23rd June 1783, entered the École Polytechnique in 1799, became Lieutenant of Artillery in 1802, and went through all Napoleon's campaigns till 1810, when he retired with the grade of Captain. In 1814 he once more took up arms for his chief; again retired after the abdication of Napoleon,

only to return once more in 1815, in order to fortify the Vosges for the Emperor, who held him in special esteem. He finally married and settled down to an uneventful country life till 1848, when he was elected to the National Assembly, and died at Neufchateau on the 11th of July 1857.

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sight had failed to detect, which turned out to be a hare running its last race.

"Then again I remember him on the days when the fruit was gathered in, framed in the oval window of the loft, pelting the village urchins with apples, which he hurled down into the courtyard, apostrophising the crowd with grotesque nicknames, whilst those below, scrambling for the missiles, seemed to furnish my father with a miniature reminiscence of the past times of war.

"Then again—but here my memory fails me—I try to recall my father's face, but can only remember a warm and terribly thin hand, which I was told to kiss, as it was stretched forth from the coverlet. That night, returning to the Pension Goubaix, I dreamt a dream of the nature of a nightmare, in which my aunt de Courmont (the clever woman whom I have described under the name of *Madame Gervaisais*, and who first inspired me with a love for the beautiful) appeared to me, and in so lifelike a form that I had difficulty in believing it was not her real self, and she uttered these words, 'Edmond, your father will not last three days.' That was on Sunday night, and on the following Tuesday I was sent for to attend my father's funeral."

There were fully eight years between the brothers, Edmond having been born under the reign of the Bourbons, and Jules during that of the citizen king, Louis Philippe. The two boys saw very little of one another for some time, for Edmond was early sent to the Pension Goubaix, a famous

school founded and managed by a man who had been in his day a successful playwright. It was there that the elder de Goncourt made the acquaintance of Alexandre Dumas *fil*s, from whose pen, by the way, came many years later a remarkable description of the Pension Goubaix, for to it he sends his miserable hero in *l'Affaire Clémenceau*, much as Dickens sent Nicholas Nickleby to Dotheboys Hall. But Edmond's school life does not seem to have left nearly so strong an impression on him as on the boy destined to be one of his literary rivals, and all that we know of his childhood and youth is contained in a very few striking pictures of what he recalls having seen and noticed.

After some years spent at the Pension Goubaix, Edmond finally entered the Lycée Henri Quatre, and formed part of the class of a certain worthy M. Caboche, who used to set his pupils the task of giving in Latin verse a description of the Duchess of Burgundy, according to Saint Simon's account of Louis the Fourteenth's vivacious granddaughter. M. Caboche and his pupil seemed to have got on excellently together, though on one occasion something said or done by the boy caused the master to utter the curious prophecy: "As for you, M. de Goncourt, you will give rise to scandal!"

Madame de Goncourt became a widow in 1834, when Jules was four and Edmond twelve years of age. She seems to have entirely devoted the rest of her life to her two sons, and more especially to Jules, who, being a delicate nervous child, required

most of her care. "Poor mother," says M. de Goncourt in the pages already quoted, "her whole life was one of grief and misfortune. . . . I recall her sweet sad face (with the changes of physiognomy which no picture can render) under one or two of those circumstances which leave behind a vivid impression.

"I remember one occasion when I was quite a child, and very ill after measles and whooping-cough; I was lying in a large bed, and she was stooping over me; beside her was the pretty curly head of her brother Armand, a young officer of hussars (for nearly all the men of our two families were soldiers). Suddenly, I could not then divine the reason, she threw the sheet over my little thin, corpse-like body, and falling into her brother's arms, burst into tears. . . .

"How well I remember my mother, on those Shrove Tuesdays, when she gave an annual fancy dress ball to all the children of the family and to their little friends; then, a tiny world of shepherdesses, peasant girls, fishwives, harlequins, sailors, and Turks, filled the quiet flat, and caused an unwonted stir. On these occasions some of the brightness of the childish carnival was reflected on her face, to which it lent a charming radiance.

"I seem to see her again, my mother, during those years when, retired from the world, and no longer young, she became of an evening the gentle magister of my brother. In the bourgeois bedroom, with its old family furniture and Empire

clock, I see our mother seated in an arm-chair close to my brother, who during his lesson is raised, by a fat dictionary, to the level of the old mahogany table, on which his elbows rest."

During the summer months, Madame de Goncourt generally took her children into the country, and Jules has left a delightful description of a visit the two boys paid with their mother to M. and Madame Hippolyte Passy at Gisors. It seems to have been their first experience of simple family life, and to have left a lasting impression on their minds. M. and Madame Passy dwelt in a château which had once been a convent, and the quaint old house standing in a large park, "with its shady thickets, and winding streams," seems to have been a very paradise to the young Passys and their friends. Years later Jules de Goncourt wrote in his diary—

"I am now at Gisors, and the image of my childhood rises before me free of all gloom and terror.

"The beautiful little memories, which had faded from my head and heart, have come to life and put forth unexpectedly new blossoms, as a plant which has appeared dead suddenly comes to life: every corner of the house and gardens contains (for me) a recollection and a lost treasure: it is as if I stood beside the grave of pleasures which can never be lived over again. We were all children together then, and did not wish to be anything but children; life seemed one vast holiday, crowded with pastimes which left no bitter taste, and with joys which had a to-morrow. How often we rushed down the rose-

sight had failed to detect, which turned out to be a hare running its last race.

“Then again I remember him on the days when the fruit was gathered in, framed in the oval window of the loft, pelting the village urchins with apples, which he hurled down into the courtyard, apostrophising the crowd with grotesque nicknames, whilst those below, scrambling for the missiles, seemed to furnish my father with a miniature reminiscence of the past times of war.

“Then again—but here my memory fails me—I try to recall my father’s face, but can only remember a warm and terribly thin hand, which I was told to kiss, as it was stretched forth from the coverlet. That night, returning to the Pension Goubaix, I dreamt a dream of the nature of a nightmare, in which my aunt de Courmont (the clever woman whom I have described under the name of *Madame Gervaisais*, and who first inspired me with a love for the beautiful) appeared to me, and in so lifelike a form that I had difficulty in believing it was not her real self, and she uttered these words, ‘Edmond, your father will not last three days.’ That was on Sunday night, and on the following Tuesday I was sent for to attend my father’s funeral.”

There were fully eight years between the brothers, Edmond having been born under the reign of the Bourbons, and Jules during that of the citizen king, Louis Philippe. The two boys saw very little of one another for some time, for Edmond was early sent to the Pension Goubaix, a famous

school founded and managed by a man who had been in his day a successful playwright. It was there that the elder de Goncourt made the acquaintance of Alexandre Dumas *fils*, from whose pen, by the way, came many years later a remarkable description of the Pension Goubaix, for to it he sends his miserable hero in *l'Affaire Clémenceau*, much as Dickens sent Nicholas Nickleby to Dotheboys Hall. But Edmond's school life does not seem to have left nearly so strong an impression on him as on the boy destined to be one of his literary rivals, and all that we know of his childhood and youth is contained in a very few striking pictures of what he recalls having seen and noticed.

After some years spent at the Pension Goubaix, Edmond finally entered the Lycée Henri Quatre, and formed part of the class of a certain worthy M. Caboche, who used to set his pupils the task of giving in Latin verse a description of the Duchess of Burgundy, according to Saint Simon's account of Louis the Fourteenth's vivacious granddaughter. M. Caboche and his pupil seemed to have got on excellently together, though on one occasion something said or done by the boy caused the master to utter the curious prophecy: "As for you, M. de Goncourt, you will give rise to scandal!"

Madame de Goncourt became a widow in 1834, when Jules was four and Edmond twelve years of age. She seems to have entirely devoted the rest of her life to her two sons, and more especially to Jules, who, being a delicate nervous child, required



most of her care. "Poor mother," says M. de Goncourt in the pages already quoted, "her whole life was one of grief and misfortune. . . . I recall her sweet sad face (with the changes of physiognomy which no picture can render) under one or two of those circumstances which leave behind a vivid impression.

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bordered flight of steps leading to the lawn. I remember our game of prisoner's base: one camp was under the old apple-tree, the other by the huge clump of lilac. What a foolish but joyous rivalry was ours! What fire we put into it all! I can remember hesitating for the space of quite three seconds as to whether I should not throw myself into the river to avoid being caught by my adversary. Ah! what a children's paradise was the house, and the garden was no less enchanting! The old convent, now changed into a bourgeois château, seemed to have been planned specially with a view to children's games. . . .

"But the little ferry-boat, in which we used to cross and recross the river, has ceased to exist.

"What changes and ravages have been brought about already! The small bridge, so dangerous to the rower, against which bumped many a boat in our time, now sleeps peacefully under the river. The little narrow strip of water, which used to run round the island where the tall poplars stood, has grown into quite a wide stream. Alas! the old apple-tree (which yielded us, however, but sorry fruit) is also dead."

It was during this first visit to Gisors that Jules de Goncourt made the acquaintance of Louis Passy, a lad destined in after years to be his most intimate friend, and the recipient of his most characteristic letters; there were also the two little daughters of the house, a source of deep interest to both the boy visitors; indeed their first love affairs

may be said to date from their visit to Gisors, for pretty Jenny became so enthusiastically attached to Edmond that she kept a collection of his peach-stones in a box. The whole of the little party employed themselves in amateur theatricals; Madame Passy provided the costumes, and even allowed them to use a pot of rouge which had once belonged to Madame Martin (of Vernis-Martin fame), and which had actually cost a hundred francs. "Numerous indeed were the incidents, and keen was the stimulant to our vanity, provided by the rehearsals which Père Pourrat took in hand, bidding us ever follow the dramatic maxim of Talma; and ah! the delightful childish element that prevailed! for instance, the anger of Blanche when she discovered that the tenor had devoured the pear which she was supposed to eat on the stage. Could one ever forget, either, the joyful little suppers, consisting as a rule of two dozen apple puffs, served out to the dramatic troupe?"

"Then at last came the great day preceding that of the performance, when Madame Passy laid out all the costumes in the room in which we are sleeping to-day."

M. Louis Passy preserved all the letters written to him by Jules, including a boyish epistle, which bears the date August 23rd, 1844.

"DEAR LOUIS,—I ought to have written to you yesterday, but it was impossible. I hope you will forgive me. I have now been two days at Nancy,

a charming town, ornamented with magnificent squares and promenades ; one of those to which we resort every evening, reminds me of the Tuileries. Although it is holiday time, I am not enjoying myself as much this year as on former occasions ; perhaps I was spoiled by having you as a companion, and by all the kindness your mother showed me. Are you enjoying yourself at Etuf ? Are you and Blanche chasing many butterflies, and catching many fishes ? Do you take long walks with your father, and do you go hunting with him ? Please write all details ; they interest me greatly. My letter will arrive on your birthday, and I seize this festive opportunity for telling you of the strong affection I feel for you. The day I came away I met M. Pourrat (Louis Passy's tutor) with his two children. Antonin looks a good sort of fellow. Write to me as soon as you can ; your letter will give me the greatest pleasure.

"To-morrow I start for Neufchateau. Good-bye, dear Louis. My mother joins with me in love to you and Blanche, and begs to be remembered kindly to your mother and to all your family. My brother claims a share of this remembrance.—  
Your affectionate friend, JULES."

When it became too warm to stay in Paris, and no invitation came from provincial friends or relations, Madame de Goncourt spent the summer holidays with one of her sisters-in-law, Madame de Courmont, a lady destined to exercise a great

influence on her nephews' youth, and a woman of rare and remarkable intelligence. During the winter she inhabited a charming apartment at the corner of the Place Vendôme, and every Sunday Edmond's greatest pleasure, when a schoolboy, was to go and sit at the feet of the aunt of whom he afterward drew so curious a picture in the novel, *Madame Gervaisais*. "Tante Nathalie" entertained many members of the artistic and literary world, in unostentatious French fashion, and it was in her drawing-room that Edmond first met Rachel, when the latter was but a timid *débutante*, though beginning to be famous. M. de Goncourt has written a fine description of Madame de Courmont sitting reading close to the window looking out on the great square; forming a bright background to the slight stately figure, was the beautiful Greuze portrait of her mother, one of the finest works of the eighteenth-century master, and painted at a period when his sitter had been married but a few months. It was to Madame de Courmont that the elder at least of the two brothers owed his intense love of literature, for she read and discussed freely all that was published, and this in so natural a fashion that no one ever affected to think her a blue-stocking.

In those days there were perhaps but four or five collectors, in the modern sense of the word, in Paris; Madame de Courmont could claim to be one of them, for she possessed a true artistic sense, and a passionate delight in the rare old tapestries, sculptured ivories, old lace, precious china, and

the thousand and one *biblots* and curiosities, then thought of little account, but now worth their weight in gold.

Every May, Madame de Courmont and her sister-in-law migrated to an old villa in Menil Montant, a gift from the Regent to Mademoiselle Marquise, and both Edmond and Jules seem to have greatly enjoyed this yearly plunge into an old-world atmosphere.

In addition to the park, boasting of two tiny temples dedicated to the God of Love, and a delightful kitchen garden jealously guarded by the old gardener, there was a tiny theatre, which, though in ruins, proved the joy of the two lads, and perhaps first gave them the love for things dramatic, which became later one of their most marked characteristics.

During the holidays it was also Edmond's pride and pleasure to accompany his mother and two aunts on curiosity-hunting expeditions. The three ladies, dressed in the clear muslin of those days, shod with delicate little prunella shoes with silk sandals crossed and tied round the ankles, would walk daintily down the hill into the Faubourg Saint Antoine, where the curiosity shops of the Paris of 1835 were then to be found, and after having picked up some excellent bargain, they would make their way slowly once more to the heights of Menil Montant, Edmond proudly carrying his aunt's newly acquired treasure till he was able to lay the precious burden down on one of the spindle-legged Louis

with alternate hopes and fears. Jules seems to have first realised the gravity of his mother's state in the following letter to M. Passy :—

“CHÂTEAU DE MAGNY,  
*Tuesday, September 4, 1848.*

“MY DEAR LOUIS,—My poor mother is dying. As I told you in my last letter, she was getting better, but a fortnight ago she became feverish, and had to return to bed. Since then, dear friend, she has got steadily worse, and now her state leaves no hope. Fortunately Edmond has been here some days. Together we shall have more strength to bear the terrible blow which awaits us. Alas, my dear Louis, may it never be your lot to be crushed under the weight of a like sorrow. I have not the strength to write any more. Think of me in sympathy.—Your affectionate friend,

JULES.”

The next morning Madame de Goncourt received Extreme Unction, commended Jules to his elder brother, a trust most worthily fulfilled, and died as quietly as she had lived, leaving in both her sons' hearts an imperishable memory, and we may add a lasting influence.

On September 24th, after their sad return to Paris, Jules wrote to his friend :—

“MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I only returned from Magny yesterday, and found your two kind letters



shadow of the Duchess of Angoulême's great Leghorn hat. He had an ancient livery, an ancient carriage, and an ancient negro whom he had imported from the colonies, where he had once led a joyous existence. This relation of mine was still under the influence of the most extraordinary prejudices; for instance, he believed that the people who make you look at the moon put things in the telescopes injurious to the eyesight!

"He attended mass, fasted and celebrated Easter in the most exemplary manner; it was only towards the end of Lent that fasting exasperated him: then he took to scolding the servants. There was in this man a remnant of some great principle fallen into second childhood. He was generous, venerable, and sympathetic, had a good heart, and was of noble race."

And so the de Goncourts' youth passed away, Jules justifying his mother's system of home education by his successes at the Collège Bourbon, where he won, though only a day scholar, Greek and Latin prizes, and a history Accessit. In his spare time he composed a drama in verse, *Etienne Marcel*, a title indicating clearly what were then the young poet's political sympathies. About the same time he read, during class, *Notre Dame de Paris*, and illustrated the margin of each page with pen and ink drawings.

Edmond, with the simple nobility of nature which later always made him take the second place in all

that concerned his own and his brother's joint life and fame, consented to accept a post in the Ministry of Finance, although all his instinct and aptitude were literary and artistic, in order to please and satisfy his mother, who longed to see her eldest son definitely settled, as she thought, in a good Government office.

Jules, then eighteen years of age, seems to have had his vivid imagination powerfully affected by the insurrection which took place in the June of 1848. He wrote on the 3rd of July to Louis Passy:—

“We ran a great danger, my dear Louis. Some of the papers would like to travesty the terrible event which has just occurred into being a slight riot. This is untrue. It was an insurrection, and an insurrection which was very nearly becoming a revolution. Had Paris been placed in a state of siege two hours earlier, had the Hôtel de Ville been taken, and had Cavaignac been killed, all was lost. On the Saturday evening the Generals, gathered together in council at the Ministry of Finance, refused to answer for the situation. . . . There can be no mistake, dear Louis, this is the first skirmish in the social war, the war of the needy against the rich, of him who possesses nothing against him who possesses all, the first page in the books of Socialism and of Communism. . . .

“Edmond only found himself in the brawl on Monday night, and cannot claim the glory of having fired a single bullet. On Friday his Company was

fighting, but he was tied to his office. The only person wounded among our friends is M. Michel. . . . As you may imagine, M. Nisard is almost crazy with terror; his sighs would split mountains: poor classical Jeremiah! . . . People do nothing but read the papers; all business is laid aside."

A fortnight later—

"I repeat, the June insurrection was the preface to social war. You answer me that this struggle has existed since the beginning of the world; I agree; but this hatred for the wealthy, for the superior, was until the present time disguised under more or less specious pretexts, such as the defence of a principle, of a king, or of a pretender. At the present time we see the hatred in all its monstrous nudity. Until lately the people used to say, 'This Prince does not treat us fairly, let us put another in his place, and all will go well.' Now they say, 'Let us govern ourselves, let us make our own laws,' and this is more logical."

The possible danger incurred by her sons either shattered Madame de Goncourt's already weak health, or she had long been more seriously ailing than the two young men had been told; but be that as it may, Edmond and Jules soon became aware that all was not as it should be. Much alarmed, they moved her to the Château de Magny, a fine old house in Seine-et-Marne, then belonging to their cousins the de Villedeuils. There she lingered quietly on, her condition filling those around her

with alternate hopes and fears. Jules seems to have first realised the gravity of his mother's state in the following letter to M. Passy :—

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On September 24th, after their sad return to Paris, Jules wrote to his friend :—

"MY VERY DEAR FRIEND,—I only returned from Magny yesterday, and found your two kind letters

on my arrival. I can understand your anxiety on receiving no news from me. Do not fear, I have still the moral strength and energy to write a few lines to a friend.

"Accept my warm thanks for your remembrance of me, dear Louis, and for your friendship of many years. Though there is no consolation for the loss I have just undergone, it is nevertheless a relief to find sympathy and mourning among all who knew my mother. All my friends (and you, more than any, dear Louis), have proved that they deserved that title, and that they felt, not merely the 'banale' sympathy inspired by happy days in common, but the solid affection so much needed in times of trouble.

"Your mother behaved as I expected on this occasion; but I had no need of any such assurance, for I know the affection she cherished for us both before this terrible trouble came upon us. She will be of the number of my mother's friends who will ever be dear to us; these friendships are part of a legacy to which we shall always hold fast. . . . On Tuesday, she was so ill that the last Sacraments were administered. When this heart-breaking ceremony was ended, my mother said to us 'Is it all over?' She did not see grim death approaching, she did not know she was about to die; a mother always clings to life.

"Then she communicated her last wishes to Edmond, and joined our hands together. The

death agony began at a quarter-past four: an hour later we were orphans.

"I know, dear Louis, that it means happiness to her. She suffered so much that death was a relief. But for us, and especially for me, is it not the loss of the very centre of all our affections, the object of all our love? Ah! poor mother! What can I say of my plans for the future? What is to be my career? To what profession can one destine oneself at this moment of social chaos when all humanity seems to have 'turned giddy, swaying to and fro like a drunken man,' as says Bossuet. Our only settled plan is to go to Italy for a year or two, unless fighting should take place there also within the next six weeks. . . ."

But before giving any serious thought to this longed-for Italian tour, Jules made up his mind to pass his examinations, and in November he writes to Louis Passy from Bar-sur-Seine :—

"As for me, dear Louis, I am trotting along at my usual leisurely pace. I have just finished getting through Roman history. The following is the sum total of my knowledge: I know philosophy, ancient and modern history. Before I leave, I will learn all about the Middle Ages and modern history. I will look up my geography and literature, and I shall have nothing left for the days between the 10th and the 30th of December but mathematics, physics, chemistry, and natural history. That's what I call order and progress. . . . As for politics,

I must tell you at once briefly that I am more of a pessimist than ever."

By the end of the year both Jules and Louis Passy had passed with signal success the government examination, and obtained the privilege of writing "*Bachelier*" after their names.

## CHAPTER II

The state of Europe in the year 1849—Edmond and Jules' first travels—  
A walking tour through Burgundy and Provence—First impressions of Algiers—Return to Paris—Art studies and summer holidays.

IN the spring of 1849 Europe was still agitated by the ground swell from the convulsions of the previous year. The French monarchy, seemingly secure in its mixture of common sense and good intention, had broken up with the suddenness of a sheet of ice. By the death of his sister Madame Adelaide, the king had lost his best friend and political adviser. With this kindly, vigorous old woman of seventy, it seemed as if the good genius of the Orleans family had perished. Within three months Louis Philippe was an exile in England, his narrow electoral system swept away, and France given over to an indescribable mixture of theorists. Lamartine fell into office, and made eloquent speeches at the Hôtel de Ville; he had written the famous "History of the Girondins," was very intelligent and singularly handsome; it seems on looking back that he had no other special aptitude for the position. In fine, came the violent insurrections of the workmen, put down by General de Cavaignac; then the race for the Presidency, in which Louis Napoleon won. But in the



meantime Europe had caught fire, and thrones came toppling down with extraordinary rapidity. Italy was as much shaken as France; the Pope had left Rome, Mazzini and Garibaldi kept the city, Gioberti agitated Piedmont, and Montanelli Tuscany. In upper Italy the French Revolution became the signal for a popular rising against the Austrian rule, and Radetsky, the commander of the Austrian army, was compelled to relinquish Lombardy and fall back on Verona. The Italian disturbances, varying in result and prolific of bloodshed, discouraged the two young men from crossing the Alps; and after waiting the whole winter, in the hope that European politics would calm down, Jules, in a letter written on the 23rd of May 1849 to Louis Passy, told him of the change, or rather modification, in their plans.

“Decidedly, my friend, I persist in my opinion in regard to our epoch, namely, that it is terribly disagreeable to very many people, and particularly to that respectable class called tourists. All Europe is full of troubles, of insurrections, of the firing of guns. The Italian question is desperately complicated all things considered, as the *Constitutionnel* would say, ‘clouds are covering the political horizon.’ So that we two are furious, and cannot reconcile ourselves to being compelled by prudence to renounce our Italian tour, and this, after having taken all necessary steps, made every preparation, and in fact almost packed our trunks preparatory to paying our respects to the classic land of artists and of macaroni. In revenge we have decided to make

a long journey in the South of France, since the country of the rogue and of the riot, and the birth-place of impromptu revolutions, is the one where still exists the most public order. Thus, my dear friend, you see that our separation will not be as long as I expected, and this gives me some consolation. Our tour will not be prolonged beyond November. We shall winter in Paris, and have plenty of leisure for seeing one another."

"BAR-SUR-SEINE, 11th June 1849.

"If only in reading those three words, 'Bar-sur-Seine,' you must feel reassured about me, for they signify that I am far from Paris. You see I have followed your advice, and here I am, not a few kilomètres from the home of the plague. The four or five days which preceded my departure Paris had the cholic, Paris was dying, Paris was afraid. Panic was the order of the day; every other thought, every other subject of conversation was basketted. The mute was in his glory, the bier was enthroned in the wealthy quarters, whilst in poorer districts the coffins were carried. The capital smiled only a muscular smile, for her soul was draped with black. In short, the cholera, my dear Louis, has left us a visiting card almost as large as that of 1832.

"Whatever happens, I am going to take during my pedestrian trip through France, knapsack on back, and stick in hand—I am going to take, say I, only one volume, 'Victor Hugo.' This is

one of the greatest homages ever rendered to the great man. I feel sure he would be much flattered if he heard of it; unfortunately the greatest acts of devotion are only rewarded by anonymity."

"BAR-SUR-SEINE, 26th June 1849.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I think that the cholera must have saved us from an insurrection on the 13th of June. All thoughts were turned towards the great Destroyer, so we escaped that other great plague called Civil War. I have just read Byron: have you? He is an absolutely French poet. His poem of 'Don Juan' seems to have been written by a Musset, but a gin-drinking Musset. It is an incomplete work, full of witty touches, which would seem rather to belong to a vaudeville than to a comedy."

In his early letters to Louis Passy, Jules constantly interposed verses, sometimes grave, sometimes gay, but he soon gave up poetry, and never cared to have these early rhymes alluded to.

"BAR-SUR-SEINE, 9th July 1849.

"You are at Vichy, my dear friend, living, you tell me, in the house of the somewhat famous Marquise de Sévigné. I congratulate you. Those places peopled with memories make agreeable resting places. They put a little poetry into our bourgeois century; something retrospectively picturesque, in the midst of all our modern trivialities. . . .

Poetry of the past, when will you return? Yesterday I was in a château belonging to my cousin. It was once the manor-house of the Abbés of Molesmes. Imagine five towers, gigantic chimneys, charming corkscrew staircases, shields embossed with coats-of-arms, everything there recalls the period guillotined by '89. . . .

"As for me, I spend all my days on or in the water, either boating or swimming. I consider a river lined with trees the prettiest sight that can be seen. In three or four days we start from here on our pedestrian tour. Write to me to Dijon, Poste Restante. . . ."

After their mother's death Edmond and Jules found themselves possessed of a modest fortune, and it is not to be wondered at, that their first thought was to begin their joint life by seeing something of the great world of which they had heard so much and seen so little. The two young men set off from Bar-sur-Seine in the early days of July, clad in white blouses and carrying knapsacks on their backs. Jules was so slight, so rosy, and smooth-checked, that the shrewd peasantry of Burgundy and Provence credited Edmond with having eloped with his sweetheart, travestied for the nonce into a boy companion.

Although they thoroughly enjoyed the experience from an artistic point of view, if we except Jules' frequent letters to Louis Passy, none of the sights they saw seem to have inspired either of the

brothers with a wish to put their impressions on paper. On the contrary, when resting in some little wayside inn after the long day's walk through the beautiful country they were traversing, Jules' chief thought was to record in his pocket diary the number of kilomètres just accomplished, and to note the names of the towns through which they had passed. Here and there, however, we come across a slight description full of feeling for the picturesque.

*"Thursday, 13th September—Sixty-first day  
—From Paray-le-Monial to the Château  
of Digoine (15 kilomètres).*

"Château, period Louis XIV.—of royal dimensions. M. de Chabriant shows us round a very fine park surrounding a splendid lake. A conservatory conceived in the aerial spirit of a winter garden, rich with an indigenous and exotic flora. A theatre decorated by Cicéri, white and gold, family shields of those allied to the Chabriants, a small copy of the theatre at Versailles, the very frame for one of Musset's proverbs, and Clodions, (the bath-room of Besenval), for which Lord Hereford once offered 65,000 francs. . . .

*"Friday, 21st September—Sixty-ninth day—  
From Bourg to Macon (34 kilomètres).*

"We drew in the Parish Church from eight o'clock to twelve, took coffee close by, drew in the church of Brou from half-past one to half-past

five, and then started for Macon at six o'clock, at racing pace. Dined on the road on two small cakes. Eight leagues and a half (34 kilomètres) *in five hours and five minutes*. Carriages go over the same ground in four hours and a half—supped on a trout and a red pheasant."

The 29th of the same month finds them at Vienne, from which place Jules writes a long letter to Louis Passy, in which are summed up his then literary ideas, and where we once more observe that touch of the artistic temperament which made him unwilling to settle down to a quiet bourgeois existence.

"My literary convictions must indeed be part of myself—and repose on solid foundations—as you failed in converting me to Boileau, but what would you have? After having perused your sermon I read a few verses of Hugo. To you poetry consists in a continual periphrasis of words. . . . How about ideas? You reduce the poet, essentially a creator and thinker, to being only a worker in mosaic, or a composer of rhymes. Yes, I love Victor Hugo! I care for him because he wrote *Notre Dame de Paris*: because he wrote *Marion Delorme*, *Les Burgraves*, *Le Roi s'Amuse*—because, whatever you may say, his plays are original, not only owing to touches thrown in by chance, but through his descriptions of character, magnificently rendered; and finally, this man of genius interprets what I feel, and his works appeal to me more than any others I have read."

And then he continues, in answer evidently to some passage in a letter recently received from his friend—"I thank you sincerely for the advice which you give me as to the necessity of selecting a career. I will only tell you that your exhortations, joined to those of my uncle Jules, unfortunately arrived somewhat late. My resolution is quite firm, and nothing will induce me to change it, neither sermons nor advice, not even from you whose friendship is so well proved. To use a common and false expression, I *mean to do nothing*. By doing this I know I shall expose myself to constant criticism from a certain portion of my family, who would fain make themselves responsible for my happiness by placing me into one of those offices where figures are totted up and letters copied, and which are the accepted outlets of almost all the young men of my position. But what would you have? I am absolutely without ambition. I know my lack of it is monstrous, but so it is. I would not accept the most honourable and lucrative post in the world, and were it given to me I would have none of it. I object to all those public functions and offices which are now so much sought for, and above all, I do not think one of them worth the stooping necessary to obtain it. This is my opinion, and as the affair concerns myself, I have the right to think as I choose.

"Oh, I know very well what answer you will make to me. 'Everybody does something.' My family say the same thing, 'See what others are doing.' Now is this a serious, a really serious argument?

It is absolutely as if one wished to dress all the world—short and tall, humpbacked and straight—in the same suit.

“All that remains to me now is to give your hand a hearty shake, and to threaten you with another dull letter if you again attack Victor Hugo and my independence—a man and a thing to which I hold.”

The Grande Chartreuse seems to have made a great impression on the two young tourists. But it was not until they reached Algiers that we find them speaking with real enthusiasm of their journey: and it was to this short sojourn in Africa that M. Edmond de Goncourt attributes his own and his brother's first genuine impulsion towards a literary career.

“ALGIERS, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1849.

“It is surely flattering, dear Louis, to receive letters dated from the land of dates, of the Couscoussou, and of the Bedouin. You see now what it is to have tourist friends, who write you nice long letters.

“Embarked on the 5<sup>th</sup>, on the 7<sup>th</sup> I touched African soil; since then I have done nothing but run over Algiers, a pencil in one hand, and a paint-brush in the other.

“From my windows I command the vast blue Mediterranean, bounded far away perhaps by some detached link of the Atlas Mountains. The muezzin is lamenting on the roof of the mosque, and I can hear the guttural cries of the Moorish porters, bearing heavy weights along the Rue de



la Marine. You must admit that it is a triumph of local colour.

"I can't help thinking, dear boy, that travellers have been created to make others picture the countries they are visiting. Now do they religiously fulfil this *rôle*? From what they have hitherto said, Algiers passes for a completely French town, picturesque as is a *sous-préfecture* boasting of omnibuses, street lamps, pavements, &c., &c., and other embellishments which make painters and poets gnash their teeth. Well, this was a prejudice, and a dishonouring prejudice. Algiers contains three French streets, all the rest are Arab—streets, dear boy, where two people cannot walk abreast, and enamelled with costumes—what costumes! Listen.

"A strange, picturesque Babel of costumes. The Arab, draped in his white burnous; the Jewess, with her pyramidal sarma; the Moorish woman, a white ghost with gleaming eyes; the Negro, with his yellow Madras handkerchief, and his blue striped shirt; the Moor, with his red turban and vest, white trousers and yellow slippers; the Jewish children, loaded with velvets and gilded ornaments; the rich Turk, with turban glittering with embroidery; the Zouave,—and as background to this crazy patchwork of colour, the sad uniformity of our European dress. . . .

"We pace the streets of Algiers at all hours of the night and day. The Arabs are absolutely in-offensive. . . . Decidedly there are but two towns in

the world, Paris and Algiers. Paris, the city of ~~all~~<sup>every body</sup> ~~the world~~; Algiers, the city of the artist. . . .

"We shall leave here the 10th of December, and be in Paris on the 17th. . . . By the way, is Rachel really going to act Marion Delorme? If this is true I retain you for a partner, even if we have to form part of a gallery queue for two hours."

Africa had so entirely conquered the two brothers that they made up their minds to return and live there, as soon as the business connected with their mother's will and property should be settled. Indeed, hearing that an expedition to Timbuctoo was being organised for the following year, they actually put down their names among those who wished to join the expedition. But Paris soon regained her place in their heart, and Louis Passy heard no more of African schemes.

The first winter of their life in Paris without their mother, was almost entirely devoted by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt to drawing and painting. On their return from Algiers they had installed themselves at No. 43 Rue Saint Georges, in a pretty apartment situated on the third floor, destined to be during the next twenty years their abode, and the silent witness of their joys and sorrows, disappointments and triumphs.

In the spring of 1850 they went through Switzerland and Belgium, and settled down for the summer months at Sainte Adresse, the bright little town which forms so pleasant a suburb to Havre, where

we learn, from a letter written by Jules to Louis Passy, they spent a delightful holiday, reading Shakespere and Rabelais, lying full length on the grassy cliffs, "like lizards in the sun," and taking long walks in wooded lanes, where now and again they came upon some rustic farm or picturesque cottage, which formed the subject of a study in drawing or water-colour. When tired of walking they went fishing. In this same letter there is also a word let drop as to Jules' coming literary proclivities, for we are told he amused himself "between two tides," with writing nineteen chapters of a work which he dared not entitle a story. So as not to lose all touch with what was going on in Paris, the two brothers became subscribers to the *Peuple* and to the *Assemblée Nationale*; as the first named of these papers was Radical, and the second Conservative in opinion, they were able to see both sides of the then political questions of the day.

### CHAPTER III

Literary *débuts*—First essays in dramatic writing—Country holidays—The de Goncourts' first book, *En 18 \* \**—The *Coup-d'État*—A review by Jules Janin—A weekly newspaper—The brothers enter journalism—They make the acquaintance of Gavarni the caricaturist—A letter from Victor Hugo to Janin.

WHEN describing the brothers' first essay in literature we cannot do better than quote M. de Goncourt's own words: "It was during one autumn evening of the year 1850. . . . The lamp-light had obliged us to put away our painting, and impelled by I know not what inspiration, we sat down at the great table on which we generally worked at our water-colours, and began to write a vaudeville, our pen being a brush dipped in Chinese ink."

The two brothers baptized their little play *Sans Titre*, and in fear and trembling took the manuscript to Sainville, then a well-known actor of the Palais Royal Theatre. The comedy would probably have finally seen the footlights, had not the principal incident in the play been, by some strange coincidence, duplicated in *Le Bourreau des Crânes*, a vaudeville produced shortly after at the *Variétés*. But this non-success does not seem to have cast down either author, for whilst negotiations were still pending, Jules writes to Louis Passy: "Whatever

happens we can claim an ample provision of energy, of resignation, and of activity. It is only by knocking often that one ends by getting in."

Their next attempt, a three-act comedy, may be said to have been a reminiscence of their Algerian tour, and had for title *Abou Hassan*. This play was also offered to the Palais Royal, but it failed to find a home in any Paris theatre, and was, together with *Sans Titre*, finally burnt by the young dramatists.

The winter and spring of 1851 were spent in painting, and in a journey through Southern France, when they made purchases in the far-famed curiosity shops of Dijon; for even at this period of their joint lives Messieurs de Goncourt had already developed the love of rare and precious books, tapestries, engravings, &c., &c., which later took with them such vast proportions.

June found them drinking the waters at Loècheles-Bains, a Swiss cure; and it was there, in the intervals between the treatment, and a few excursions into the mountains, that the brothers began *En 18 . . .*, their first joint essay in novel writing.

From Loèche they went to Neufchateau to attend a girl cousin's wedding: and Jules' impression of this sudden plunge into family life may be gathered from a passage in one of his letters to Louis Passy:—

"September 7, 1851.

"Ouf! ouf! ouf! dear Louis. . . . It all began on the 28th of August and continued till the 6th of

September; August boasts of thirty-one days, and we enjoyed two large meals each day; you can easily calculate to what all this amounted. Six hours out of the twenty-four spent in ingestion! Then dessert, coffee, liqueurs, and white favours galore. No change, no rest! I was best man, general manager, and organiser of all the fêtes! The cooking—but how can I attempt to describe the cooking! Bells ringing, hobble-de-hoys running wild, postillions swathed in ribbons, gala coaches, white gowns, the fatal ‘I will’ . . . and the whole time, before, during, and after, the kettles singing, the pots boiling, the sauces simmering, and insides loading—Ouf! ouf! ouf!”

But notwithstanding the cares of this family festival, the authors worked on steadily at their book, spending hours in the Neufchateau Town Library, and, as Jules expressed it, “working themselves to death.”

On the 25th of October they returned to their quiet rooms in the Rue Saint Georges, and within a few days of giving over their precious manuscript to Gardes, the printer, who then published the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, Jules gave an idea of his own and his brother's state of mind when writing to Louis Passy:—

“I have nothing to say, I know nothing of what is going on round us. . . . We devote all our thoughts to our child, and hope to give it over to the midwife towards the 5th of next month. You see we

are under fire, but working not a little for our own pleasure. . .

"When one has laboured ten months on a work one is glad when the day comes of going to press. Going to press! those words thrill me deeply! . . .

"Our friend, P. C. de Villedeuil, is going into the breach rather before ourselves; I fancy his book will appear towards the 10th; but he publishing a political work, will have on his side all the newspapers belonging to his party, as well as the sixty-three wine-producing departments to which he has dedicated his book, and where it will be singularly apropos: being *A History of the Tax on Alcoholic Drinks*. You see that this would not be quite our style. After all, if no one takes our part, you will tell me that we shall have the shade of Sterne: still it remains to be known whether his ghost will recognise us. . . .

"A review has lately been published, the first number of which promises to be the very thing for us, the *Revue de Paris*, which, dealing with new schools of literature, is under the patronage of Théophile Gautier.

"I am writing you an egoistical letter; Montaigne's 'I' is enthroned without a rival. I beg of you to take your revenge when answering me. By the way, I do not know if I have already told you that I believe the Joinville candidature has a certain chance of success with the peasantry, at any rate in our part of the world, that is, in the Vosges; for this is the textual answer made by one of our farmers

when asked to give us his opinions on de Joinville —‘Joinville? Ah! I should like to have him. He has never harmed anybody!’ This phrase is a symptom. . . .”

The de Goncourts’ literary *début* was fixed all unknowingly for an eventful day, the 2nd of December 1851. M. Edmond de Goncourt has told the story of this, their first experience of authorship, in the preface to the Belgian edition of *En* 18 . .

“On the 1st of December we went to bed, my brother and I, in the happy state of mind common to young authors, who await the coming morning in order to see their first volume on sale in every bookseller’s shop. We were dreaming of editions—numberless editions,—when suddenly, after a loud knocking at the door, in rushed our cousin Blamont, once a National Guard, but now a grey-haired, asthmatical, violent old Conservative.

“‘Good God: it’s come upon us!’ he exclaimed.

“‘What has?’

“‘The *coup-d’état*!’

“‘The devil! And our novel which was to be put on sale to-day . . . !’

“‘Your novel—a novel? Ah, my fine fellows, France won’t trouble herself much about novels to-day,’ and with a gesture peculiar to himself, he buttoned up his coat as tightly as if he had been drawing up a sword belt, took a brief leave of us, and went off to carry the triumphant news from the district of Notre Dame de Lorette to his acquaint-



ances, then scarcely out of their beds, in the Faubourg St. Germain."

As may be easily imagined, the unfortunate authors of *En 18* . . soon went down into the street, looking eagerly, since more substantial joys seemed delayed, at the wall where an advertisement of their book was to have been posted early that morning. But they soon found that the advertisement was conspicuous by its absence, and it was only some days later that they discovered what had occurred. Gardes' printing-offices had been searched by the police, who, during the night preceding the *coup-d'état*, made many perquisitions in order to strike terror into the hearts of law-abiding Parisians, and afraid lest the de Goncourts' cabalistic title should be thought to bear a hidden allusion to 18 Brumaire, the printer burnt all the advertisements which were to have spread the fame of *En 18* . . to the four corners of Paris.

Thus, to the two young authors' sad disappointment, their novel was not put on sale till two days later, the 4th of December: but the book-buying public had other things to think of than that of adding to their libraries, and for some days, no one, even among their own journalistic acquaintances, seemed to be aware that the brothers had joined the great army of *littérateurs*.

Jules Janin, the famous critic, was at this period contributing a weekly theatrical and literary *feuilleton* to the *Journal des Débats*; and during the week which followed the *coup-d'état*, his readers waited

with some amusement for the Monday week following the great event, since, though his interests ran in other directions, Janin sometimes condescended to write a witty column of political criticism, and seldom had he had such an opportunity. What, then, was the surprise of his friends and readers, when opening the *Débats* on the 15th of December 1851, they found that, so far from attacking the Prince-President, Janin had devoted his *feuilleton* to reviewing *En 18 . . .*, the first work of two unknown writers.

Yet, to those behind the scenes, the great critic's action had at least one explanation. Jules de Goncourt was an ardent admirer of Janin's style, and though *En 18 . . .* was nothing if not original in conception and character, yet the novel (a strange cabalistic study of a man who is in love, simultaneously with a female spy and an artist's model) belonged to the school of literary composition inaugurated by Janin himself in his story, *L'Ane Mort et la Femme Guillotinée*, an extraordinary parody of *Bug-Jardal, ou le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*. But whatever the reason which made him devote an article to *En 18 . . .*, the kindly satire of the critic of the *Débats*, and the few words of judicious advice with which he wound up his review of their book, encouraged the brothers to go on working in the face of bitter disappointment. Of the thousand copies printed, only some sixty of *En 18 . . .* changed hands, and they were almost all, without exception, presentation copies. The

remainder were piled up in a garret and forgotten till many years later, when Jules and Edmond, while searching for a book they were in need of, came upon the heap of old volumes, and began glancing through the already forgotten pages ; finding the work "childish, feeble, and incomplete," they deliberately burnt every copy, and this is why the first edition of *En 18 . .* has become one of the literary rarities of the century, for the French bibliomaniac who possesses the shabby little book in his library can indeed boast of a treasure.

Some years ago a Belgian publisher, M. Kistemaekers of Brussels, begged M. Edmond de Goncourt to allow him to republish *En 18 . .*, and thus the de Goncourts' first book once more saw the light, this time enriched with a witty preface, in which the surviving author told the history of its first appearance and disappearance.

As is the custom in France, the brothers called on Jules Janin, to thank him for the article which had given them such pleasure. The critic then lived in a vast *appartement* in the Rue de Vaugirard, close to the Luxembourg, and there, doubtless assisted by the legendary talking parrot, who was said to help him in the composition of his *feuilletons*, he received Jules and Edmond with the words, "You are exactly the couple I took you to be!" And when bidding them *au revoir*, M. Janin observed significantly, "For those who wish to succeed there is only the drama." And during their long walk home, the critic's late visitors composed

together *vivâ voce* a one-act piece, in which there should be but two characters, that of a pretty woman and that of a man of the world, talking over the fire, on the last evening of the old year, of the events of the preceding twelve months. The witty little dialogue, which might even now serve as a model to many modern French dramatists, was submitted to Jules Janin, who gave the authors an introduction to Madame Allan, the *sociétaire* of the Comedie Française, who had just played with great success in de Musset's "*Il faut qu'une porte soit ouverte ou fermée.*"

"And so we finally found ourselves on the fifth floor of a house in the Rue Mogador, for it was there the actress lived who brought Musset back from Russia. She was giving the last finishing touches to her toilet, in front of a folding mirror which surrounded her like a screen. The great *comédienne* was quite affable and kindly, but with a voice so rough and croaky that we scarcely recognised the sound, so entirely did she possess the art of transforming her voice, so that it recalled sweet music when she was on the stage.

"She made an appointment with us for the next day. I was much moved, but Madame Allan, to encourage us during the reading, let fall those little flattering murmurs for which one would willingly kiss the slippers of an actress. In short, she accepted the part, and undertook to learn it, and to play it on the 31st of December; to-day being the 21st."

Full of hope, the two dramatists hurried hither and thither, seeing an actor here, a manager there; but finally, after a week's time and effort wasted, Madame Allan changed her mind, to the bitter disappointment of the two brothers, and *La Nuit de la Saint Sylvestre*, as the play was called, was never staged. But though this was their third dramatic failure, the brothers did not lose heart, but continued writing plays, according to the advice of Jules Janin, without, however, any success; indeed, one comedy, entitled *Les Incroyables*, and dealing with a First Empire divorce, was hopelessly lost by the readers of the Theatre Français, and has never been found to this day. Years later, the de Goncourts referred to this far from promising literary *début* in the following passage:—"Why did we not describe day by day our rough and terrible struggle against anonymity, the painful occasions in which we were overlooked or insulted: the public we sought, but who eluded us; the future towards which we walked at times with resignation, but oftener in despair. We had no friends, no connections, and everything was closed to us. Alas! for the organised silence in which those who desire the benefits of recognition are passed over—the grief-laden and heart-breaking hours we spent—come back to us. Ah! that silent, inward agony, where none looked on but our bleeding self-consciousness, and our fainting hearts: that monotonous and uneventful suffering, written as it were on our quivering flesh. What

a fine subject for analysis ; but no writer will ever write it—for the slightest success, a publisher who accepts your work, the gain of a few hundred francs, a number of articles taken at five or six sous a line, the bringing of your name before the public, any one of these occurrences helps to cure the past, and to lap us round with the waters of Lethe.”

About a month before the publication of *En 18 . . .*, the de Goncourts renewed acquaintance with their cousin, Comte Charles de Villedeuil.

“One morning there was a ring at the door ; a hirsute and serious young man, whom we hardly recognised, was shown in. . . . When quite a child he already aped the man, and had been expelled from the Collège Stanislas. As a schoolboy of fifteen I had once sat next him at dinner, and he had made me open my eyes wide with astonishment at the orgies which he described. Even then he was already dabbling in literature, and always corrected the proofs of his tutor Tanoski. At twenty he held Republican opinions, and had grown a beard. He wore a pointed hat of dead leaf colour, talked about ‘my political party,’ wrote in the *Liberté de Penser*, compounded terrible articles against the Inquisition, and lent money to X—— the philosopher.”

The three cousins soon became inseparable, Charles working more or less seriously at his *History of the Tax on Alcoholic Liquors*, Edmond and Jules writing their novel, and later a play.

“One evening in a café near the Gymnase, by way of having something to do, we amused our-

selves by suggesting different names for a new paper. 'L'Éclair!' exclaimed Villedeuil gaily, and then still laughing, 'Apropos, suppose we start a paper of that name, eh?' He left us full of his idea, sought out the money-lenders, thought out a frontispiece which was to exhibit the names of Hugo, de Musset, and George Sand, falling in streaks of forked lightning on the Institute. He bought a Bottin Directory, and busied himself in sending out circulars to all his friends." The Censor suppressed the frontispiece, but on the 12th of January 1852, *L'Éclair* made its first weekly bow to the public of advanced thinkers and writers, with a view to whom the proprietor-editor, Charles de Villedeuil, had founded the journal.

*L'Éclair* had for sub-title *Revue Hebdomadaire de la Littérature des Théâtres et des Arts*, and like most would-be newspaper proprietors, the young editor and his friends expected to make both their fortune and their fame out of the venture. The office was on the ground floor of a house in the Rue d'Aumale; and M. de Villedeuil and the two de Goncourts seem to have composed the whole staff. The first number of *L'Éclair*, now greatly prized by collectors of literary curiosities, contained three articles by the two brothers; one was on their book *En 18 . . .*, followed by the first real newspaper article ever published by them, and which consisted of a study of the famous actor, Fechter. The public was supposed to know nothing of the authorship of the various articles, and Villedeuil

sometimes signed his compositions, "Cornelius Wolff."

"The head-quarters of our newspaper," wrote Jules de Goncourt, "are on the ground floor of a house in a new street, the Rue d'Aumale. We spend two or three hours each week in the office, awaiting, each time we hear a step echoing down the quiet street, a subscriber or at least a contributor! Nothing comes, not even 'copy,' not even, and this is stranger still, a poet!" A few days later—"We continue publishing our paper with the faith of apostles, and the illusions common to shareholders. Villedeuil has been obliged to sell his collection of *Ordonnances des Rois de France*, to prolong its existence; he has also got hold of a money-lender, from whom he has extracted five or six thousand francs."

But part of the value of the above six thousand francs had been delivered in the form of two hundred bottles of champagne, and undismayed, M. de Villedeuil proposed that the editors of *L'Éclair* should advertise their paper by giving a ball, at which the champagne should be offered to new readers in return for subscriptions. The idea was actually carried out, and a merry Bohemian gathering took place; but though it is reasonable to suppose that the champagne was all drunk, there is no record of new subscriptions having flowed in on this occasion.

It was during this year, 1852, that the brothers made the acquaintance of Gavarni the caricaturist, a



brilliant artist, sometimes called the French Cruikshank, and who had, for good or evil, a distinct influence both on the future lives and writings of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt.

In his personal Memoirs, which will only see the light after his death, the elder of the two brothers sums up in a few words what both he and his brother asserted so frequently in their diary: "Yes, I repeat this, my profession of faith, the two greatest of our century are Balzac and Gavarni, the first who created the *Comédie Humaine* with his pen, the second who completed the same task with his pencil; the last is as great as the first."

In the de Goncourts' remarkable study of their old friend's life and work, they have described him as he seemed when he first appeared to them: "Gavarni was tall and well-built. . . . When he was dressed, wearing a frock-coat buttoned up to the chin, he had the smart, trim figure of a man of thirty. In his youth his hair and moustache must have been reddish in tint, but at the time we made his acquaintance his hair was grey, or rather ash-colour."

Even when they were children Gavarni had been a hero to the de Goncourts, and when in response to a courteous note they set out to see him in his house at Point du Jour, a village situated on the road to Versailles, Edmond and Jules felt that they were on the point of realising one of their most longed-for wishes.

Jules records what took place: "They were a long

time opening the door; at last a servant appeared and took us to a little studio in the garden, lighted from above and full of sunlight. It was here that we made our first visit to Gavarni.

"He took us through his house and told us its story: a workshop of false money coiners during the Directoire, it became in time the property of the well-known Leroy, Josephine's mantle-maker, and he utilised the iron room in which had been coined the money, to hang up Napoleon's bee-embroidered state mantles. Gavarni led us across the large rooms on the ground floor, . . . and we followed him all over the house, and down interminable corridors on the second floor, where out of women's handboxes old ill-packed carnival costumes peeped."

During the year 1852 the de Goncourts did little else but write regularly for the Comte de Villedeuil's weekly paper, and this brought them into close relations with most of the leading journalists and writers of the day. We catch in the diary a glimpse of a merry band of holiday makers at Marlotte, the village still beloved of poets and painters in the Forest of Fontainebleau. Père Saccaux then kept the only hostelry, and there, each paying his share, the whole party, including Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, Murger "leading his *vie de Bohême* in sober earnest," Hafner the painter, Gavarni, and many more whose names are now unknown to fame, stayed some days, drinking in the pure air, and taking long excursions into the great forest which lay round them.

By August the de Goncourts were back in Paris, paying a visit to their literary godfather, Jules Janin. "He showed us a letter from Victor Hugo, brought by Mdle. Thuillier, and made us read the following sentence: 'Here is it very melancholy . . . it rains, and is as if tears were falling.' In the letter Hugo thanked Janin for his article on the sale of his furniture, told him that his book would appear in a month's time, and that he would send him a copy either in a basket of fish or in a metal case; and he added, 'They say that after the appearance of this book Bonaparte will expel me from the Academy. I bequeath you my seat.'"

## CHAPTER IV

*Paris*, a daily literary paper—Edmond and Jules de Goncourt supœnaed to appear before the Courts—Their offence—A literary *cause-célèbre*—The brothers give up their connection with daily journalism—Publication of *La Lorette*—An autumn holiday—Millet and Jacques—Anecdote.

IN the autumn of the same year the Comte de Villedeuil, in nowise dismayed by the failure of *L'Éclair*, determined to start a daily paper modelled on the *Charivari*, but which should be only literary, dramatic, and artistic, that is to say, non-political. The de Goncourts entered into the scheme with ardour, and on the 20th of October Jules wrote in their diary: "The first number of *Paris* comes out to-day. We believe it to be the first literary daily paper started since the creation of the world. We have written the leading article."

The two brothers suggested to their cousin the advisability of asking Gavarni to become a regular contributor to their paper, and the caricaturist, then at the height of his popularity, promised to provide an illustration every day for a year, and strange to say, kept his word scrupulously during the whole twelve months.

Inasmuch as *L'Éclair* had been an unsuccessful, and, if we may so term it, amateur production,

the *Paris* became popular with the class for which it was specially written from the first day of its appearance. A whole band of young writers, many of whom were destined afterwards to take a great place in ephemeral French literature, were constant contributors to its columns, and Alphonse Karr, Xavier de Montépin, Théodore de Banville, and the two de Goncourts became known to the French reading world first through the *Paris*.

The offices of the paper were situated in the Rue Bergère, off the Boulevard des Italiens, and all bohemian Paris passed and repassed through the strange unbusiness-like suite of apartments. M. de Villedeuil's study was hung with black, now and again all the lights would be put out, and a weird drinking party would take place. The manager, a certain M. Barbier, boasted of the only regular office-like room on the *Paris* floor. "At the office writing-table there daily assembled Murger, with his humble mien: Aurélien Scholl, with his eyeglass screwed into one eye, his witty fits of anger, and his oft-reiterated intention of some day earning 50,000 francs a year by writing endless novels; Banville, with his pallid face, his thin voice, subtle paradoxes, and amusing human silhouettes; Karr, always accompanied by the inseparable Giatayes . . . and in the midst of all this world of penmen, Villedeuil perorating, giving orders right and left, running here and there, writing letters, inventing every few days a new advertising system, or a fresh combination, which would infallibly bring

the paper within the next fortnight ten thousand subscribers!"

M. de Villedeuil, however, did not foresee the event which was to make his paper known to every reader in Paris. "Towards the end of December," say the de Goncourts when describing what took place, "Villedeuil rushed into the office, and exclaimed in a melodramatic tone, 'The *Paris* is being prosecuted. Two articles are incriminated; the one is by Karr, the other is that in which there are some verses. . . . Who has quoted verses during the last month?'

"'We did!' we cried."

And here must be told the story of one of the most curious French literary trials of the century, and which may rank with that of Flaubert anent *Madame Bovary*, and Baudelaire with his *Fleurs du Mal*. Of the group who wrote in the *Paris*, the de Goncourts seemed the least likely to have written anything which could be said to outrage public morality: but the unexpected always happens. Mademoiselle Nathalie, a Pensionnaire of the Comédie Française, having sent to Rachel, by way of compliment, a small painting by Diaz, representing Venus and Adonis, the latter refused to accept the picture; both her letter refusing the gift, and Mademoiselle Nathalie's reply, formed part of the autograph collection of Jules Janin, who allowed his young friends to copy the epistles. The de Goncourts saw therein matter for an amusing article; accordingly, on the 15th of December, seven weeks

after the publication of the first number of the *Paris*, there appeared on the first page of the paper an article entitled, "A Journey from No. 43 Rue Saint Georges to No. 1 Rue Lafitte," in which they told the story, and quoted the following letter and answer, without, however, giving the ladies' names.

"MY DEAR COMRADE,—This Diaz is somewhat too airy for the decoration of my little house. It is true I have a partiality for the suggestiveness of a charming wit, but I cannot pretend to share Arsinœ's admiration for nudities. Do not think me prudish. But why should I deprive you of a painting which I myself should be forced to hide! A thousand thanks, nevertheless, and believe me, your devoted Comrade, \_\_\_\_\_"

"DEAR COMRADE,—It was foolish indeed, nay almost blasphemous, to have imagined that my little picture could be worthy of your surroundings. Nevertheless, my folly has procured for me the inestimable privilege of becoming acquainted with the limits of your modesty. Allow me, however, to defend the passage of a comedy which you here quote in a somewhat strained sense. It is precisely when pictures are in question that Arsinœ does not like nudities :—

‘She covers with haste the painting’s nudities,  
But turns with pleasure towards realities.’

"I take back my little Diaz, which is feeling some-

what confused by its foolhardy journey, and am hiding its blushes in my own room, where only M. A. can see it.—Yours very sincerely, \_\_\_\_\_ ”

In order to describe the subject of the painting, the brothers borrowed from a collection of French poetry, then recently edited by Sainte-Beuve, and which had been crowned by the Academy, five lines of some verses by Tahureau, a well-known poet of the 18th century. The then Chief of Police, who had not looked with a favourable eye on the new paper, saw here an opportunity of injuring M. de Villedeuil's venture, and the de Goncourts were chosen as scapegoats, as much on account of their supposed Orleanist sympathies as for this quotation.

Several of their friends and relations wrote to the Attorney-General, M. de Royer, but he replied that nothing good could come of any appeal, and that the two brothers would certainly be condemned, probably to prison, certainly to a fine, but that if they wished to address a petition to the Emperor, he would do what he could to obtain a favourable answer.

Early in February Jules wrote :—

“MY DEAR GAVARNI,—On Saturday, at eleven o'clock, we shall be in the dock, appearing before the judges in the Sixth Court. We are so busy that we have not time to go to Auteuil. So we are sending you this bad news by letter, knowing



how sorry you would be if your poor 'little boys' were brought in guilty. If you have any friend who could be of use, let me know.

"J. DE GONCOURT."

In compliance with a curious survival of 18th century courtesy, the two young men, accompanied by their uncle, Jules de Courmont, paid a visit to each of their future judges, and also to the barrister who had been given charge of the Prosecution.

At last the great day arrived. The three victims were driven down to the law courts in a yellow coach and four, by their cousin and editor, who was much disappointed at not being one of the accused.

The court, where the trial was about to take place, was in general given over to small and unimportant cases, and "just before our turn a young man of emaciated appearance was tried; he gave one the appearance, the idea of one who had suffered from hallucinations; acting on his own judgment he had condemned the Emperor to death, and had sent a copy of the act of condemnation to all the embassies. He was told then and there that he was to spend three years in prison. (It was he who some years later fired at the Emperor at the door of the Opéra Comique.)

"At last our case was called. The President pronounced the words, 'Pass to the bar,' in a way which impressed the public. The bar is the place in which thieves are arraigned. Never in a case

of a press-prosecution, not even in an assize court, had there been an instance of a journalist being told to 'Pass to the bar,' the rule having been that they always remained seated by their counsel. But they were determined to spare us nothing. 'They rehearsed this yesterday; I was told so by a barrister,' said Karr, as he sat down with us between the gendarmes.

"We were hurt, indignant. Our voices trembled with anger when they asked us our names, and we rang them out defiantly, as if we were addressing a tribunal of blood."

The Counsel for the Prosecution, though he had told the prisoners during their courtesy call that he personally could see nothing objectionable in their article, declared in court, with a burst of forensic eloquence, that the three writers before him were men without any regard for the law or public morals, that they were nameless rogues, men who had never known a mother's care, and who were without any feeling or respect for womanhood! The de Goncourts had been guided in the choice of their Counsel by a shrewd old friend, and greatly to his clients' annoyance, he performed his task in the following fashion: "He groaned, he wept over our crime, and depicted us as good, simple young fellows, somewhat foolish—indeed, whose minds were slightly affected. He could find no better extenuating circumstance to urge in our favour than that we had an old servant who had been with us for twenty years! After this touching statement,

which was drowned in a flood of foolish words, we heard the curious murmur, which implies that a case is won, run round the public; but just at that moment our cause was adjourned to the following week. 'Of course,' we observed, 'they meant to pass a sentence of condemnation at the very outset; they dared not do it to-day; the public is too much in our favour.'"

And yet this eight days' adjournment turned out for the best, for in the interval a new Attorney-General was appointed, and not only was M. Rouland (de Royer's successor) an Orleanist, but he was also a relation of Madame Jules Janin. Thus when the three young men were brought up to receive judgment they were severely reprimanded, but acquitted, and allowed to escape free of even a fine. But although they got off with nothing worse than a scolding, the de Goncourts were informed unofficially that they would be wiser to give up journalism, as they were not looked upon with favour at headquarters. They still continued, however, to contribute regularly to the *Paris*, but the Tahureau incident had filled them both with bitter anger against the Imperial Government, and they had serious thoughts of going to Belgium in order to start a paper, to be styled *Le Pamphlet*. Fortunately their increasing interest in their historical studies withdrew them from journalism, and on the 27th of April 1853 appeared their last piece of work in the *Paris*.

During their connection with *L'Éclair* and the

Paris, the de Goncourts had written many remarkable articles afterwards published in volume form under various titles, *Mystères des Théâtres* (theatrical criticisms), *Une Voiture de Masques*, and *Pages Retrouvées*, all collections of miscellaneous articles; and *La Lorette*, which formed part of a series named *Lèpres Modernes*, which had produced a considerable impression when brought out in *L'Éclair* and the *Paris*.

On the 27th of July, Jules de Goncourt notes in the diary: "I have been to see Rouland in order to discover if I can publish *La Lorette* without fear of new legal difficulties." Apparently the answer was favourable, for the little volume was brought out by Dentu in the early autumn of the same year, and the first edition was sold out in a week.

*La Lorette*, which was offered to the public for the modest sum of fifty centimes, was dedicated by the authors to Gavarni, who had drawn a frontispiece for the volume only too truly in touch with the sinister nature of the subject. *La Lorette* may be said to have been the prototype of Zola's *Nana*, and in her counterfeit presentment, as imagined by Gavarni, we see a touch of that attraction to England and things English, which formed so strong a part of the complex nature of the caricaturist, for in the original design he introduced a placard on which were inscribed the words, *To let*.

The unexpected success of this little volume was a revelation to the brothers. "This makes us realise," they wrote, "that one can actually sell a

book!" And they continued working with renewed hope and energy.

They spent September at Veules, the Norman fishing village—"a lonely spot, where it would be easy to be quite happy were it not that there is only one inn, and in this inn an innkeeper whose only idea of food consists of ducks served in two fashions." The brothers were asked to come to Veules by the engraver, Louis Leroy, and his wife, a charming couple, to whom constant reference is made in the diary. On the 30th of August Jules writes to his host—"We shall only be able to leave on Saturday the third (of September), and so, unless we should both die before then, which I trust is unlikely, we shall find ourselves at Veules at four o'clock in the afternoon. . . ."

The Leroy's were intimate with all the younger artists of the day, and when not bathing or painting the four friends had endless discussions about Millet, whose great talent had only been recognised by the general public some four years previously.

"Millet, the son of a peasant near Cherbourg, when little more than a child, whilst on the road from the town where he had seen the pictures in the public gallery, would draw with pen and pencil, worrying his father to give him the pence wherewith to purchase materials. His first drawings were copies of the holy pictures taken from his grandmother's prayer-book. Some years later, when his father took him to a Cherbourg drawing master, and showed the latter some of his son's

pencil drawings, the master said, 'It is monstrous to leave such a child working in the fields.' Finally the town of Cherbourg gave him the small allowance which enabled him to enter the studio of Paul Delaroche.

"His wife, a regular peasant woman, can neither read nor write. When Millet leaves home the husband and wife correspond together by a system of dots they have invented for the purpose.

"One day, during his first visit to Barbizon, he was taking a walk with Jacques, when they came upon some peasants mowing; the latter laughed at the two artists as town's-folk. Millet walked up to them, pretended not to understand what they were doing, asked if a scythe really cuts the grass properly, and if it was hard work: then, seizing a scythe, he began to lay about him right and left, and showed the astonished peasantry that he also knew a thing or two!"

On the 7th of September Jules de Goncourt writes from Veules a long letter to Gavarni. "Can-not you come and spend eight days with your little man? Our colony is composed of four people, M. and Madame Leroy and ourselves, all ready to welcome you, and delighted at the thought of having your company. . . . The life here is very simple and quiet. We get up and have lunch; then, while M. Leroy goes out sketching, we write, and Madame Leroy imitates the labours of Penelope. Each brings to dinner whatever appetite he can boast of, and in the evening we allow ourselves to

be blown to pieces by the sharp sea wind. Add a few baths when the sun is kind enough to shine down on us, and you will, my dear friend, have a clear idea of what the life here is like. . . ."

The extraordinary success of *La Lorette* not only delighted the two authors, but encouraged them to think of undertaking another small volume of the same kind and to be sold at the same price. After casting about for a good subject they decided on a short volume dealing with the *Histoire du Plaisir sous la Terreur*, for Edmond and Jules had always felt a special interest in the social history of the great Revolution. But they soon found that the subject lent itself to far more serious and lengthy treatment than they had at first imagined, and soon the tiny booklet they had thought of writing grew into the volume which finally appeared under the title of *Histoire de la Société pendant la Révolution*.

## CHAPTER V

*Histoire de la Société pendant la Révolution*—Reception of the book by the critics—Letter from Jules de Goncourt to Gavarni—Publication of *Histoire de la Société pendant le Directoire*—Letters to Aurélien Scholl—Gavarni's description of Balzac, the Duchesse d'Abrantès, Madame Récamier.

THE winter of 1854 was entirely spent by the de Goncourts working in the various libraries and public and private archives, thrown open to them by the kindness of their many friends. With characteristic energy the brothers, in order to make it impossible for them to accept social invitations, gave away their dress clothes, and they bought hundreds of pamphlets and papers then comparatively worthless, but which have since acquired a great historical interest, and now form part of M. Edmond de Goncourt's priceless collection.

*La Terreur*, in the year 1854, was still a memory to the aged, and a familiar theme of conversation to all those whose childhood had been steeped in hearing their parents and grandparents tell the story of the Revolution. Until Messieurs de Goncourt brought out their work, nothing in the shape of an impartial statement of what living Paris was really like during those strange years, had been attempted. Lamartine, Michelet, Louis Blanc,



and Mignet had all told the story according to their various political prejudices and temperaments. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt studied the period with which they were about to deal as passionless observers, simply noting day by day, and hour by hour, any little fact, anecdote, or trait which could add to the completeness of their picture ; indeed their historical works all differ from that of other historians, inasmuch as they always contented themselves with stating facts, leaving it to their readers to draw conclusions.

Whilst engaged on this book Jules and Edmond's only relaxation was taking long walks in the Paris suburbs, and occasionally receiving the visit of some friend who brought them news of what the world was doing.

Among those whom they saw most frequently was Celestin de Nanteuil, the leading illustrator of the day, an intimate of Victor Hugo, Gautier, and Dumas, whose works were in many cases illustrated by him. As a lithographer he was unequalled, and like most French artists he possessed to a high degree the gift of conversation.

It was in the course of a visit to the Rue Saint Georges that de Nanteuil told the de Goncourts of the strange mental condition into which had fallen their common friend, the brilliant Gerard de Nerval. "Celestin de Nanteuil tells us," they write in their diary, "that Gerard de Nerval came back from Italy absolutely penniless, but bringing with him four thousand francs' worth of marble mantelpieces.

Also that in the penury of his later years he has retained so marked a taste for luxurious surroundings that he makes himself cravat pins out of gilt paper!"

Whilst working steadily on their social history of the Revolution the brothers found time to also publish a booklet, *La Révolution dans les Mœurs*, of which the preface consists of the pithy sentence, "Society should fear, not her enemies, but herself," and in it the two brothers compare the 18th century and their own time greatly to the disadvantage of the latter.

Early in the winter of 1854 the de Goncourts had the pleasure of seeing the book, which had cost them so much labour, time, and effort, very favourably received by the critics. In this, their first serious excursion into the domain of history, they had made it their object "to paint in vivid, simple colours the France of 1879 to 1800;" and it is characteristic of both the period with which they were dealing and of themselves, that the first chapter of the book described the salons of 1789, whilst in the last they gave the history of Charles Henri Sanson, the public executioner.

The following passage, in a letter written by Jules to Aurélien Scholl, shows what followed on the publication of the book: "When I tell you that we are working, I am only alluding to the actual labour of writing and proof-correcting: for as regards other things, the endless visits, putting on of white gloves, leaving of cards and volumes, the staircases we have had to climb, and the assaults we

have made on the critics, causes us to think that we possess the activity of two Napoleons. . . . I am going to speak to you of our book, knowing that you will kindly allow us to *talk shop*. Well, everything is going as it should do. All along the line articles have been promised us. . . . A very amiable letter from Sainte-Beuve. A four-paged epistle from M. de Rémusat. The promise of a long article in the *Journal des Débats* from M. Barrière, who has paid us a most flattering compliment; he actually thought before he saw us that we had been contemporaries of the great Revolution, for otherwise he did not understand how we could have written such a book! A delicious article by Jules Lecomte in *L'Indépendance*, in which he recommends every one to buy the volume, and concludes, 'This work should be found in every library.'"

Before beginning a companion work on the social history of the *Directoire*, the brothers made an expedition to Bordeaux; coming back from the south in order to spend the month of August at Saint-Adresse, near Havre. In a letter to Gavarni, overflowing with boyish fun and light spirits, the younger brother gives a lively account of their holiday:—

"We have been fortunate enough to meet a delightful fellow who insisted on taking us as boarders into his house on quite exceptional terms, that is to say, for nothing! We partake of succulent dishes, use English knives and forks." (This in

teasing allusion to Gavarni's well-known love of English life.)

"The dinner service is English, the water-bottle is English, and as for our host, he is '*very gentleman*;' he has a little Scotch terrier, one of whose ears sticks up, and one of whose ears sticks down, *a very specimen of 'Landseer dogs.'* . . .

"We spend some of our time in a very comfortable wooden hut, where there are to be found *grogs*, benches, chairs, and hammocks, right in front of the sea. Thus we have every opportunity of seeing our lady Ocean in all her smartest gowns, sometimes in her blue Sunday toilet, or again in her white ball dress, the skirt of which is covered with silver foam. It is very pleasant to watch all this whilst Toby, the Scotch dog, employs his time in catching flies.

"We stir up our sugar at the bottom of our glasses, and we light our pipes.

"This is, my dear sir, the position of your two *litre boit* (little boys), who would much like to have you with them. Master Jean (Gavarni's son) would find a pleasant play-fellow in the sea. . . . Think that you can be at Havre in four hours, and then here in five minutes! Now what say you of taking forty-eight hours' rest, and coming to bid us good-day. . .

"As for Edmond, he is what you have always known him to be; he tries to lure me out on to the cliffs at night, in order that he may have a chance of pushing me into the sea, partly because

he is jealous, and partly because he wishes to be my heir. But I look after myself. He also treads on my toes when he takes me out into society, and tells the ladies that I am 'a bad job,' so that I may have no luck with them. But you know what he is like, so I shall say no more. . . .

"Ah! We have bought in Havre a monkey the size of my fist, but whose tail is as big as my arm: an adorable little beast." Here follows the monkey's portrait. "He is far prettier than this, but I will leave this matter of taste to Jean.

"And now, sir, I have the honour to remain, not forgetting to beg of you to acknowledge the receipt of this letter as soon as possible, your very humble and obedient

JULES DE GONCOURT."

The autumn was spent by the de Goncourts compiling *La Société pendant le Directoire*, a book which, though perhaps less complete than its predecessor, remains the best and most authoritative work on the social life of the period it describes.

The volume was to appear at the end of March 1855, and Edmond and Jules, as was and is the custom abroad, made their usual calls on friends and critics.

"I found Janin, contrary to his usual custom, quite excited by the attacks of the smaller papers. He expatiated at length on the continuous abuse in a little journal, *Sans le Sou*, signed by a certain Ambriot, and observed wittily: 'Mon Dieu! the

matter is very simple—there are only a certain number of insults to be lavished every year, let us say 20,000. Well! in a constitutional Government these are divided between the King, the Ministry, &c. To-day there are the same amount of insults to be distributed, and they can only be lavished on two or three writers like myself.”

“ *Monday, March 26th.*—Our *Histoire de la Société Française pendant le Directoire* appeared on Saturday. We went to-day to see old Barrière, who stood us in such good stead with *L'Histoire de la Société Française pendant la Révolution*. He came in holding two or three sheets of papers in his hand and said, ‘You are coming to seek an article; well, look here, it is already half written.’ Thereupon he began to chat with us about the Revolution of ’89 and that of ’48, telling us that on the 15th of May, Madame Barrière, presiding at the examination of school-mistresses at the Hôtel-de-Ville, had just written on the black-board one of the difficulties of the participle when a loud noise was heard, and they cried out to her to run away;—finally the list of the Provisional Government was written up just below her participle!”

Shortly after the publication of their second book the de Goncourts began their Wednesday receptions, receptions which remained, till Jules’ illness and death, among the most delightful weekly parties in Paris. Among their closest intimates was Aurélien

Scholl, the brilliant journalist who had been with them on the staff of the *Paris*, and whose later fame has been made in the *Figaro*. He has been described as one of those men who believe in nothing, laugh at everything, and succeed in anything. Shortly before the publication of their book on the *Directoire*, the younger of the de Goncourts wrote him the following letter :—

“MY DEAR FRIEND,—I am writing to you on a Wednesday, the day of our reception. If I have a chat with you through the post, I shall regret your absence this evening a little less that I otherwise should have done.

“So you are in love! Pity yourself! In love! Love, the only reasonable folly of which man can boast, an unwritten comedy, of which the plot is never unravelled—poetry innocent of rhyme.

“The devil take me! You pity yourself! In love! a fine state to be in!

“Be easy. I will be as discreet as a confessor who knows nothing.

“Apart from your being a lover, how am I to consider you? Are you a man of letters? Are you a journalist? Are you a Parisian? Are you a Bordelais? Do you hibernate winter as well as summer in Bordeaux? Are you coming back to us? When will the volume now going to press appear? Shall you send it, or come and bring it yourself? Your letters are as vague as Lamartine’s ‘*Lac*’! I can get from them no precise details,

no idea of what you are doing, no consolation for your absence.

"We are both suffering physically, and have discovered a terrible earnest of the infirmities awaiting us in our old age ; added to this we are sick at heart, and though we are trying to battle against discouragement, yet from hour to hour we feel ourselves succumbing to its power. No one holds out a friendly hand, the old and the mediocre reign supreme ; there is no current, no movement : the sea of literature is like a smooth lake : editors are a myth. The stage is completely in the hands of noisome vaudeville—the public reading anything and everything—Criticism is a midwife who only brings abortions into the world : the smaller papers produce no new writers, and the more important suppress the names of the younger men ; enmity and lack of union are felt to the highest degree in our republic of letters ; one's allies are absurd, and one's struggles, one's feverish excitement, one's wild desire for a great future, in a word, all this emotional element that we mingle with the intellectual serves no purpose and leads to nothing. The result of all these struggles is to strengthen us in our resolution to make fewer concessions than ever, to hold our standard higher than ever, and to pray louder than ever to Saint Henri Heine. . . .

"And yet in the midst of all these annoyances and these disappointments, we have accomplished a certain amount of work. In a fortnight or three weeks our *Directoire* will be finished. . . .



"The newspapers still appear, the women go on being pretty, the earth goes round, books still sell, and the Academy has not yet ceased to be, but we all know, dear Aurélien, that all these things only seem to occur!

"Keep a little corner for us in your heart, be it ever so full and inhabited.

"JULES DE GONCOURT."

About the same time to George Asseline :—

"MY DEAR TOURIST,—I bought the day before yesterday a very curious manuscript on the *Fermiers Généraux* of the 18th century, those Mirès who knew how to carry off their wealth. In it I found the following: 'The King, Louis XV., royally entertained by Bouret, wished to express his thanks by presenting him with a fine autograph written in his best hand. Bouret ransacked the chateau, but did not succeed in finding a drop of ink.'

"You are not Louis XV., and I, alas! am not Bouret. I found some ink, but no proper paper. So forgive me this untidy sheet.

"So you are coming and going, spending your honeymoon in Switzerland, a land like unto a splendid hostess, who, keeping open house, never grows any older. As you journey the mountains salute you, the streams hold converse with you, the lakes smile upon you, just as they do in one of Henri Heine's landscapes—all this is as it should be. Scarce an ugly rumour reaches you from

France, that world of lovely women, great actresses, and old wine. After all this it would be somewhat unkind not to think of Sainte-Beuve while you are at **Lausanne**. I had always fancied that it was his native place. You tell me that he was only professor there, nay, he created the place.

“As for us, dear Asseline, we have just sent our last sheet to press, and—this is quite between ourselves—we are almost sure of having found a publisher. Believe it if you can, I can scarcely bring myself to do so.

“And then this very day I too have made an excursion. You are exploring Switzerland, I have discovered an unknown region peopled with villas and swings, with green arbours and with laughter, a stretch of country where the air is keen, where the trees shoot forth, and the grass peeps out of the ground, where the sand is as fine and soft as a carpet. A mountain, at least eight storeys high, from which can be seen an ocean of gold, rubies, topaz, and misty diamonds, the whole bearing a certain resemblance to a distant city. The natives call the place Montmartre. Whilst up there I drank to the health of my sick heart in a bottle of wine which seemed to me the best in the world. The table was, oh, so dirty, but the sun was shining, oh so brightly.

“So you are starting for Venice, you lucky fellow! By the way, are you sure Venice exists? Perhaps it is merely a city of dreams built up to form a background for our dramas. Victor Hugo

dug the Orfano Canal, and Bouchardy must have invented the Council of Ten. Just look into the matter and make sure of Venice.

"Literature continues to be like *Bilboquet*—that is, in a bog—and we both continue to be your friends.

JULES DE GONCOURT.

"P.S.—What do you think of Berne?"

*To a Critic.*

"Tuesday, April 23rd, 1855.

"Yes certainly, dear sir, we will present ourselves on Saturday to drink to the health of *Dante*, and I have every reason to suppose that with the aid of Lamennais and your preface, . . . his immortality will be all the more firmly established. Rest assured that we shall bring appetites worthy of Ugolino.

"By the way, what a capital idea you had there! Why shouldn't one christen a book as one does a son?"

"I wish to add how much we are indebted to you for bearing us so constantly in your mind. Our pen owes you much, I should like to assure you that it hopes to pay its debt and prove to you the gratitude of its two masters.

"J. DE GONCOURT."

Before undertaking another book, the de Goncourts brought out in pamphlet form their lengthy

criticism of the *Salon* of 1855, and during the spring and summer they saw a great deal of Gavarni, and many are the references in the diary to him and to his stories of past people and things. "Gavarni was telling us that the first time he saw Balzac was in the office of Girardin's *Mode*. He saw a round little man with handsome black eyes, turned-up nose, somewhat stooping figure, talking much and loudly, and whom he took for a publisher's clerk.

"Gavarni also added that Balzac's figure made a straight line from the neck to the heel, only broken by the bend of his calves; as for the novelist's front profile it was absolutely that of an ace of spades. . . ."

A day or two later, "Gavarni told us about the *salon* of the Duchesse d'Abrantès, where he at one time went constantly. All sorts of people met there. One day he saw the Admiral, Sidney Smith, go down on one knee to kiss the hand of the Duchesse. The latter was a very stout woman, with the voice of a fishwife, but with a good carriage and fine manners. Madame Regnault de Saint-Jeand'Angely, the Duchesse de Bréant, &c., a whole battalion of old women, bearing, however, the traces of former beauty, were to be seen there. One day Gavarni met a little woman of stout and common appearance, and, to use his own expression, 'reeking of the small bourgeoisie.' He asked who it was. 'Madame Récamier,' was the answer."

Such stories must have diminished the already

slight stock of illusions cherished by the two sensitive brothers, who seem nevertheless to have possessed the singular power of extracting from their friends and acquaintances more painful truths than pleasant falsehoods; even the wily Janin could not keep himself from confiding to them, "Do you know why I have lasted twenty years? Simply because I change my opinions every fortnight. If I were always saying the same thing my *feuilleton* would lose all its flavour, my readers would no longer be eager to see what I write."

Small wonder that about this time the de Goncourts note in their diary: "There remains to be expressed in literature the melancholy which has come over modern France, . . . a melancholy not without its soothing side and touch of smiling irony. The melancholy of Hamlet, of Lara, of Werther, belongs to more autumnal nations than ours. . . ."

Again—

"Every four or five hundred years a wave of savagery has to sweep over the world to revivify it, otherwise civilisation would destroy it. In old days when a nation had become highly intellectual and anæmic, from the North would come hordes of six-foot-high barbarians who remoulded the race. Now Europe cannot boast of any barbarians, but in fifty years the same task will be accomplished by the workmen. They will call it the social revolution. . . ."

In the autumn Edmond and Jules accepted an

invitation from the Passys, to spend a month in the old château at Gisors. Jules writes to Louis Passy :

*"September 9, 1855.*

"Firstly, your book is bound ! I have not yet got it, but I have seen it, and I am expecting it every day. I will bring it to you.

"Secondly, I have only untrustworthy information so far, about the republication of Corneille-Taschereau. The general opinion seems to be that it will contain little or nothing that is new in the shape of documents. It is expected to come out any day ; indeed, it is announced, in the latest Jannet catalogue, as having already appeared. I need scarcely say that if it comes out before the 18th, we will make our appearance at your home together.

"You see we are people who keep our word : we threatened to come, and now we are coming. Many thanks for receiving us, but we hope you will not put yourself out. Pray do not build a gallery of Apollo. You can have no idea of the joy with which I am looking forward to reviving old memories. What happy days these were ! What games ! what pleasure parties ! I fear those years cannot be lived over again. . . . Well, we start on the 18th at one o'clock. . . . Edmond has a fiendish cold, and my cheek is swollen to the size of a pumpkin ; toothache is an unpleasant friend, and I have just renewed its acquaintance. . . .

"Remember us both kindly to your father and mother. . . ."

Edmond and Jules, especially the latter, seem to have greatly enjoyed the return to the old house, where they had once spent so happy a holiday with their mother; and when back in the Rue Saint Georges, preparing for the Italian journey on which they had so long set their hearts, Jules writes to Aurélien Scholl:—

“We have just returned from a delightful château, a bourgeois country house which contains many of the memories and all the joys of my childhood. We spent a bright and happy fortnight in the loveliest country in the world, indulging in long intimate talks, burrowing in old books, free as air, surrounded by youth, gaiety, and beauty. . . .

“Are you coming this month? Next month you run the risk of finding your friends flown from the Rue Saint Georges. Yes, yes, they are really going off this time. They are going because they are bored, because their country is getting on their nerves, because they are seized with a cross-grained melancholy, and because they feel the need of breaking with their gutters and their Paris for five or six months. It is no use good old folk telling us that we shall find brigands and cholera in Italy: for my part, I believe those two bugbears are merely invented by the newspapers to take the place of the great sea-serpent.

“We drink to Chance! the only god who worketh miracles. . . .

"Our '*Légendes*' are going to press. I have corrected the first proof sheet to-night.

"And also during the last month or more we have been working slowly at a little thing three times as long as *La Lorette*, and which will be called, if it please God, *Les Actrices*. . . ."



## CHAPTER VI

The de Goncourts' Italian journey—Jules' letters from Venice, Parma, Pisa, and Rome—The brothers' return to Paris—A model mistress described—A visit to Montalembert—Autumn at Gisors—The original of *Renee Maupérin*—Sophie Arnould—How Thiers spent his evenings as a young man—The gradual loosening of family ties—Théophile Gautier's methods of work, as described by himself.

ON the 6th of November is inscribed in the diary these three words, "Departure for Italy." Of the six months' travel which followed there is no record save a few letters from Jules, and a number of extracts from the brothers' note-books, extracts absolutely impersonal, but giving their first impression of Italian art. What they thought of Venice is described in a letter to George Duplessis, dated the 8th December 1855:—

"MY DEAR FRIEND, — You are surrounded by Canaletto's paintings. During the last eight days I have been living amid his etchings. We can now assert that there is really a corner of the world where omnibuses go on the water, which contains numberless Paul Veroneses, where the horse is a myth, the gondola a fact, and the Council of Ten an historical truth. A splendid sun, a Swiss watch-maker's *table-d'hôte*, three windows, which from

morning to evening rejoice my eyes with glimpses of splendid landscapes by Ziem, my pipe, some Turkish tobacco, some Cyprus wine, a good digestion, thoughts as bright as the Lido; all this makes us as happy and as lazy as lizards. . . . Listen! I invite you to come and drink two glasses of Sauterne on the 1st of May, Rue Saint Georges. I will then tell you volumes—so I do not write them now.

“We both beg of you to indite us four long pages between now and the 25th of December, addressed Florence, *Poste Restante*. Tell us if there still exists a Paris and Parisians, fools who write books, idiots who read them, and those still more foolish who talk about them? . . . .”

Three weeks later, from Parma, he writes to Gavarni, who was known to have a prejudice against Venice:—

“I swear to you, by the way in which man is being constantly exploited, that I could neither write to you from Como, nor from Venice the beautiful. . . . But to-day, my friend, I am in a town which has never served as background to a melodrama, and which figures in no opera—an honest provincial town, innocent of gondolas and of romance, a town where English tourists may be counted on one's fingers. . . . I feel I can write to you bravely.

“Ah! Gavarni, there is no chance of my becoming Duke of Parma, and more's the pity! A state no larger than a table-cloth, a capital boasting, 'tis true, of more than one street, a theatre with a

repertory, a Government possessing four Cabinet ministers, and I forgot, an army which could easily perform its manœuvres on a table! Can you imagine a more delightful social position? To be king without all the world watching you, to govern without being obliged to read a newspaper! . . . I have often wondered how I could tear you away from Auteuil, now I know; I would appoint you my Minister of Agriculture; with half of my state you could make a game of ball, with the other a game of bowls, with the rest a labyrinth. . . ."

*To George Duplessis.*

"PISA, February 9, 1859.

"Well, my dear fellow, I spend my time arriving, seeing what there is to be seen, and leaving. This is a country where the vegetation forms frescoes! Galleries! Ah! galleries where it is possible to walk two hundred steps without falling across a daub, and where there are handfuls of Raphaels, Michael Angelos by the bucketful, and Andrea del Sartos by the square yard, to say nothing of cart-loads of unknown geniuses! Sculptures! Ah! my friend, remember that here at every quarter of a league are mountains of Carrara, and tons of gold and silver fashioned by Cellini. . . . A wealth of lovely colouring imprisoned in frames, wandering over ceilings, brightening the walls. . . .

"In future I shall be able, with my back to the chimney, to describe an Italian carnival. An Italian

carnival can be described in two words—have you read Shakspeare?—Much Ado about Nothing. . . . By the way, have you heard of the two children whom we left in Paris, *Les Actrices* and *La Voiture de Masques*? Do you know if they are making their way in the world: have they had their ears boxed by the critics, or received some good resounding slaps which will make the public turn round? . . . ”

The de Goncourts made a lengthy stay in Rome, seeing something of the cosmopolitan world then gathered there, and spending not a little of their time with the Prix de Rome students.

They found pleasant rooms in the Via de San Andrea del Frate, close to the Piazza del Spagna, and Jules wrote home letters to the half-dozen friends with whom he was always in constant communication.

*To Philippe de Chennevières.*

“ROME, February 21.

“ . . . Well, dear friend, during the last three months we have gone straight on, our eyes wide open, our souls satisfied.

“Venice is Venice, the city of all cities. After we had left the station, when we stepped down into the gondola-omnibus, I much feared that I should only see the scenery familiarised by Scribe's comic operas: but the devil take me, I plunged straight into the Shaksperian drama!

"Whilst in Florence we fell seriously, conscientiously, and laboriously in love with the pre-Raphaelites, the Giottoes, the Gaddis, the Lippis, the Botticellis, Pollaiolos, and Beato Angelicos. During a month we paid them assiduous courtship, and finally, through overmuch gazing, we constantly discovered an original idea in a drapery, a new school in a big toe, a system in the drawing of a cloud, and a genius in the poorest and most simple painter of the epoch. . . . Good-bye, I know nothing of what is going on, I only read a paper when it snows. In the name of our exile write to us, about anything you like, but send us by post something of yourself, and a good slice of Paris, some time during the next fortnight. . . ."

*A week later to George Duplessis.*

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—You are the best and kindest of news-givers, and with all our hearts we thank you for telling us all that is going on in Paris. . . .

"Do you care to hear something of our travels? Florence is the great museum of Italy, not the museum of idlers, but the museum of workers, painters, and thinkers. A walk through Florence is a marvellous and unequalled journey through Italian art, from its beginnings to its maturity. We have seen much, searched much, and written little.

"You would not thank me, I am sure, if I were to describe to you an Italian carnival, which is, my

dear fellow, the most puerile and innocent of diversions.

"The Tower of Pisa still leans to one side, and shows no sign of falling, being similar in this to many governments.

"Sienna is a curious town, perched high above a hollow plain, and studded with mediæval castles, ladder-like streets, bull-dogs who don't bite, and beggars who ask for charity betwixt two bursts of laughter. . . .

"By the way, have you noticed how the price of autographs is going up. If this sort of thing continues, people will soon be able to hold in a pocket-book a hundred thousand francs' worth of signatures. This is very annoying to historians who, like ourselves, are not millionaires. Last Sunday we dined with Schnetz at the Academy of France ; there were there all our artistic young hopefuls (Prix de Rome). They are nice lads, who learn to become geniuses by smoking endless cigarettes and regretting Paris ! Alas ! we do the same. . . ."

The next day he indites a long epistle, containing an animated description of an Italian carnival, to Gavarni :—

"MY DEAR FRIEND,— . . . Considering that you make Paris believe herself to be Italy when you draw the Carnival Opera Ball, I should be indeed ungrateful if I did not send you a sketch from nature of the real thing.

"The scene, if you will allow it, shall be laid in Florence——. A street. The sun. Shouts fly by, while wayfarers stop short; masked figures come and go; one carriage, two carriages, three carriages, a thousand carriages cover with dust, and pelt with bouquets the pavements, balconies, and windows. Horses, jockeys, gold and silver liveries, dozens of blue, pink, yellow, black and red dominos pass by, dancing, jumping, flying. . . .

"And the masked balls. *Veglioni*! Can you imagine a masked ball where your lady friends escape unkind remark, where the Grand Duke of Tuscany can bring his fourteen-year-old daughter, where the dancers amuse themselves innocently, where the curtains in the boxes have no cause to blush, where one overhears 'Frederick, do dance with your sister,' where the principal item in the refreshment bill is coffee, and the only policeman the Minister of Police? . . . Listen, an Italian masked ball is like unto the solemn English husband whom I saw carrying, in a red silk handkerchief, his wife's hired domino! As for the Carnival, it affords the populace the kind of amusement which children find in going into the kitchen and putting on a big apron. . . .

"The affair lasts fifteen days, but do not imagine that much feasting goes on. One evening I asked the waiter in the *Trattoria*, where we dined each evening, 'Ah! I suppose you remain open on the nights when the balls take place?' 'Oh no, Signor, we shut early, too many people would come.' . . ."

And dated the same day, a note to Aurélien Scholl:—

“We go straight before us, seeing on either side men, women, houses, palaces, churches, beggars, paintings, sunlight, and statues. Alas! my friend, one goes travelling in order to have the pleasure of returning home: the gutter of the Rue Saint Georges is to us finer than the Tiber, and the pavement of the Rue Lepelletier the best of Appian Ways. I would willingly give a month of travels and impressions for an hour’s talk with you. . . .”

March finds them still in Rome, and on hearing of Heine’s death, Jules writes to Armand Baschet: “Henri Heine is dead, a great personality gone. Better had the vault received all the mourners, rather than him they mourned. As far as I can see there are only dwarfs left to bend the bow of Ulysses.”

In May the brothers were once more installed in the Rue Saint Georges, trying to pick up the threads of their old life, at first scarce as successfully as they had hoped. “Those from whom I expected pleasant things,” writes Jules, in the diary shortly after their return, “bore me as much as I bore myself. They are exactly what they were when I left them. Nothing of the slightest interest seems to have occurred to them. They have simply gone on existing. What they tell me I already know. They are absolutely unchanged; they have the same



waistcoats, the same mistresses, and the same work to do in the world. They have achieved nothing wonderful. . . . None of my friends have even died; I am not unhappy, I am worse than if I were."

Even the literary Bohemia, in which they had once so delighted, seemed altered, for they observe:—"When Murger wrote his *Vie de Bohême*, he was far from suspecting that he was writing the history of a portion of society which would become a power at the end of five or six years; yet this has really come to pass. This self-advertising freemasonry reigns and governs, barring the way to any man who has pretensions to good birth. 'He is an *amateur*,' and with this word they damn him. He may bring the folios of a Benedictine, the wit of a Heine; yes, but that makes no difference, 'he is an *amateur*,' and he will be declared an *amateur* to the end of the chapter. . . . Without any one seeing it, this triumph of Bohemia marks really the domination of socialism in literature. . . .

"I have seen to-day the very model of mistresses. Her lover is a consumptive young Englishman, and she is so truly concerned about him that she stays at home every evening in order to prevent him going out, and shuts herself up with him, chatting, smoking cigarettes, and reading to him. . . . Two or three Englishmen and Germans frequent the house; they bring their pipes, together with half-a-dozen Hegelian ideas, and a profound contempt for all French politics, which to them seem sentimental. The lady of the

house goes out as little during the day as during the evening. She has retained even in Paris the sedentary habits of the Italian woman, and to occupy herself, when she discovers a novel in the *Constitutionnel* which will not go on to twenty-four volumes, she takes and translates it into pure Tuscan for her own private benefit.

“It is a charming house, though somewhat encumbered with portraits of friends and relations. The little parlour might be called the Temple of Friendship. There is only one portrait that contains any element of interest from the moral point of view; it is that of the mistress, painted by her lover’s mother.”

In June they made the acquaintance of Montalembert, who had been much struck by the de Goncourts’ historical researches.

“Rue du Bac.—We went through two or three courtyards, and then came on a vast dwelling situated in a quiet and secluded spot, where there is fresh air, corners of verdure, and a great piece of sky. A door, behind which was heard during some seconds the sound of footsteps before it opened, then a servant out of livery. We were shown into a drawing-room, with ebony furniture covered with red velvet, and presenting the appearance of a thoroughly bourgeois interior; yet nevertheless, above the piano, hung a copy of Perugino’s ‘Marriage of the Virgin,’ and opposite a Bruges carving.

“‘Messieurs, will you come into my study?’

"Books everywhere, tiny pictures on both sides of the mantelshelf, and hung on the gilt edge of the mirror the miniature portrait of a nun.

" 'Oh!' observed our host, 'that is a fancy dress portrait; yes, a lady of my family played the part of a nun, and had a fancy to be painted in her dress. . . . My family adore private theatricals;' and he took down from the book-shelves a volume entitled 'Dramatic Works of the Count de Montalembert, acted in the Theatre at Montalembert.' . . . 'Your picture of old Paris interested me deeply. It is very curious. I wrote to you. Yes. Your vivacity of style led you astray! The Academy is a lady who does not like such things. You know I agree with you, and not with her. It is very curious to read about these old houses in your book. I remember when we came back after the great emigration we found a horse turning a millstone in the theatre of our town house.' . . .

"If only you had been able to collect provincial oral traditions. Alas! soon they will be utterly lost. In the first chapter of his *Payans*, M. de Balzac drew a picture of the peasantry produced by the Revolution. It is not a flattering portrait, but so true. I come from Morvan, and I said to myself, 'He must have been there.' . . .

"M. de Montalembert has long, straight, grey hair, a full face, the old drawn features possessed by some children; he has a sleepy smile, his eyes are deep but lacking in lustre, a nasal voice, quiet restful amiability, and a feminine sweetness

of manner, which is shown in the way he shakes hands. . . .”

The de Goncourts had not left their love of the eighteenth century behind them in Italy, and they spent a delightful day at Versailles, going through M. Fossé d'Arcosse's autographic and historical collections. “The walls were hidden by cupboards, glass cases, pictures, frescoes, *bric-à-brac*, and historical relics. Here was Louis XVI.'s hammer, forged by his own royal hands, the shoe-buckles of Louis XV., the hunting knife of Charles II., an order for fifteen hundred francs signed Philippe Egalité. . . .

“Hearing a name pronounced by one of us, M. Fossé d'Arcosse, a tall, bony old man, while turning over a bundle of papers exclaimed, ‘Yes, I shall end by finding it, there were two branches of the family, and they boasted of a strange peculiarity. Each of these branches possessed a fortune of a hundred thousand francs in the reign of Louis XIV., the one branch placed their money in land, and now possess four hundred thousand francs, the other invested in government securities, and what with reductions and bankruptcies, their fortune has become reduced to five hundred and sixty francs!’” . . .

Lavellée told us that Feuillet de Conches the other day showed the Emperor and Empress some letters of Marie Antoinette, and that Feuillet was quite surprised to hear the Emperor speak; he said apropos of the letters, “When one is good, one seems a coward; in order to be thought courageous one has to be wicked.” . . .

The brothers seem to have been immensely impressed with the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. Writing of him they observe: "A new literature, the literature of the twentieth century, delighting in the miraculous, the scientific, the fabulation by A. + B., a literature which is at the same time crazy and mathematical, Zadig turned magistrate, Cyrano de Bergerac a pupil of Arago. Objects playing a greater part than human beings, and love, love already pushed somewhat on one side in favour of money by Balzac, the emotions giving way to other sources of interest; in a word, the novel of the future will be expected to tell the story of the brain rather than of the heart of humanity. . . .

"A day or two ago the mother of our friend Pouthier, whilst reproaching him because he had nothing to do, no prospect of a career, and no means of earning a livelihood, brought her maternal sermon to a close by this admirable phrase, 'Why, at your age, *I* was already a mother!' . . ."

Edmond and Jules spent the month of August with their cousin at the Château de Croissy, resting, and working between whiles on their new historical study.

"You ask us what we are doing!" writes the younger brother to Aurélien Scholl, then in Belgium. "We are sitting up late, making researches, and resuscitating dead men and women with whom we feel on the best of terms; we are striving to overtake the past; two-thirds of our volume is already written . . . plenty of 'copy'

in the drawer, plenty of plans in the far horizon, our hearts empty of care and free as the wind. . . .

"We are in the country, I don't quite know why! I asked what month we were in, some one said September, and so off we went. . . . I should not care to live in a château unless I had 600,000 fr. (£24,000) a year; then, all Paris should come to see me; I would edit and publish my own newspaper, receive flocks of friends, and instal a gas-jet under each leaf. . . .

"The gardener yesterday gave us a bad melon. To-morrow I shall put on a pair of gloves, and go and call on a lady-neighbour. Just now Edmond is reading Balzac; he is seated between a green bench and a bed of geraniums—the birds are singing, I conclude from habit—the shadows fall from the trees and lie down on the grass—the dogs think of nothing, but I think of you. . . ."

They received an invitation to Gisors, and Jules writes to Louis Passy:—"Only the time to get our two dozen shirts washed, and then Rose (our servant) declares that we shall be ready. . . ."

It was during this visit that the de Goncourts renewed acquaintance with one of their old play-fellows, a charming, high-spirited girl from whom the brothers, eighteen years later, drew the heroine in their truthful and admirable study of French girlhood, *Renée Maupérin*.

A pencil sketch of this young lady, drawn by Jules, is now in the possession of M. Edmond de Goncourt, and the circumstance which led to

the portrait being taken inspired one of the most striking pages in the novel.

But, without any thought of gathering literary material, Jules whilst at Gisors showed the deep impression produced on him by his fellow-guest: "Mademoiselle —— combines the cordiality and loyalty of a man with the charm of a young girl; full of thoughtful sense, with a mind and intellect lifted, one knows not how, above the bourgeois surroundings in which she was nurtured, she is full of aspirations towards moral greatness, devotion to others, and self-sacrifice. She has a keen desire for what is most delicate in the region of intelligence and art, and an utter scorn for all which usually fills the minds and conversations of women.

"She is inspired at first sight with antipathies and strong likings. Smiling with a delicious complicity at those who understand her, you see the longest of faces when she is assailed by such bores as young men who love making quotations. She is ill at ease when dealing with the artificial side of society, and says out everything just as it comes into her head, and has a peculiar understanding of studio slang. . . . She is outwardly gay; but her brightness proceeds from a soul in whose melancholy depths float visions of children's graves, and echoes of Chopin's Funeral March. She is passionately devoted to riding and driving, but she turns faint at the sight of a drop of blood, has a childish horror of unlucky Friday, of the number thirteen, and is a prey to all the superstition

and human weaknesses which are pleasing in a woman ; weaknesses combined with rare coqueties ; for instance, she loves to show her foot—the tiniest foot in the world—always neatly shod in a high-heeled, sandalled shoe.

“ She is ill-judged and belittled by women, and by those small-minded folk who have a horror of an open nature. . . . ”

And writing to Aurélien Scholl, in response to a query from his friend as to where they had just been, he says :—“ We have been spending twenty happy quiet days, without one dull hour, in a large house, royally comfortable, where the even tenor of life goes on without trouble or disturbance ; where the old men make you feel full of sap, where there is a young girl who unites the frankness of a boy, with every feminine charm, and who is, after yourself, the dearest of our friends. . . . ”

In connection with their social history of the Revolution, Messieurs de Goncourt had constant occasion and opportunity for making extracts from family archives, and hitherto unpublished private letters and diaries ; they were also, apart from their literary work, ardent autograph collectors, and this caused them to be in constant communication with Parisian dealers. Having always wished to pursue their researches into what may be called the secret social history of the eighteenth century, a lucky chance made them, during the summer of 1856, the possessors of a number of documents concerning Sophie Arnould. It came about in the following



manner: one day they were offered by Charavay, the famous autograph dealer, a bundle of old papers, whose only interest was said to lie in the period to which they referred. Whilst looking over their purchase the brothers found what purported to be the copy of some hitherto unpublished memoirs of the great actress, containing twenty-four of her letters to Monsieur and Madame Bélanger (her steward and his wife), written about the year 1800, when Mademoiselle Arnould had retired from the stage, and was about fifty-six years of age.

After taking considerable trouble to establish the authenticity of their precious find, Messieurs de Goncourt decided to publish the letters, with a short biography of the writer. The volume was brought out by Poulet Malassis, and forms the first of the long series of valuable eighteenth century documents, which, but for Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's tireless industry and enthusiasm, might have remained for ever buried in state records and family archives.

But though the autumn of 1856 was given over to hard work, for, in addition to *Sophie Arnould*, Messieurs de Goncourt were gathering together the material for the volume entitled *Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*, the younger brother found time to make a curious expedition to the haunts of a famous fortune-teller, and in the diary he wrote an amusing account of his experiences:—

“He lives in the Rue Fontaine Saint Georges. . . . An old white-haired woman showed me into a dining-



room, where were framed, on a black background, numberless hands cut out on white paper, and covered with lines, dots, and annotations, written in ink. There hung the hand of Robespierre, the hands of the Emperor and of the Empress, the hand of Monseigneur Affre, and last, not least, the hand of Madame de Pompadour.

"A door opened, and a man, with a big square head, large features, huge moustache, not unlike the portraits of Frederick Soulié, appeared. . . . He was attired in a black velvet dressing-gown, with the large falling sleeves of an astrologer. The room was in darkness, or nearly so; what light there was came from above through a stained glass window, and threw strange shadows in the gloom, through which could be vaguely seen a white owl. A table, on which a single ray of daylight fell as in Rembrandt's paintings, separated me from the fortune-teller.

" 'In which month were you born?'

" 'How old are you?'

" 'Which flower do you prefer?'

" 'What is your favourite animal?'

"Whilst saying all this he shuffled an enormous pack of cards, each card a foot high, and bearing a life episode on its surface; . . . and all these allegorical drawings, though drawn by an ignorant hand, were fantastically burlesque, monstrously ugly, . . . and with something of the savage and ghastly figurations of heathen idols imagined by primitive nations.

"With an impressive gesture the sorcerer began



speaking, and in a vulgar, uneducated voice, rolled off during half-an-hour the romantic future which lay before me. Still the individual is no fool, he spoke without hesitation, and without stopping to choose his words. . . . He said but one thing which impressed me, 'As for you, you who have nothing to be afraid of from the thrust of a sword, or from a pistol shot, have everything to fear from the stroke of a pen!'"

The brothers also formed that autumn many new ties.

"*December 10.* -- Called on Barrière of the *Débats*. . . . The old man is quite a well of historical anecdotes. He told us that he had seen the Duthé when he was quite a child. Barrière's father was jeweller to the Queen, and one day a fine lady came in to choose some ornaments. Barrière's mother, a very pretty woman, but, like every pretty woman, somewhat unwilling to admit beauty in others, asked what he thought of the lady, and when he admitted that he had thought her very attractive, 'Oh, but her neck is too long,' cried Mme. Barrière. The lady in question was Mademoiselle Duthé.

"The conversation turned on Thiers, and Barrière told a curious story about that statesman. 'When Thiers was only twenty-three, he often came to dinner in my little flat of the Rue de Condé.' Barrière had kept a set of tin soldiers, which had belonged to him when a child; and after dinner the two men used both to set them up on the top of a table, and Thiers would amuse himself during



the whole evening by knocking down the soldiers with bread bullets. This was a prelude to his descriptions of the battles of the First Empire.

“‘But soon,’ added Barrière, ‘the small flat of a humble man of letters could no longer contain the rising politician.’ . . .

“Gavarni leads more the life of a recluse than ever. You find nobody now in the red-tiled garret where he works. He is no longer a man, he is a *pure abstraction*, and nothing, absolutely nothing, seems to link him to humanity. When you mention the names of his acquaintances you feel that they are already buried under clods of forgetfulness. He scarcely remembers them, and if he alludes to any of them, you see by his far-off look that he is searching the by-ways of his memory.

“This evening, some chance remark called up a hidden recollection, and he drew us a grotesque picture of Daumier, the great artist who was more indifferent to the success of his life work than was any one he had ever met. He described the vast room, where round a cast-iron stove, throwing out a white heat, a group of men sat on the ground, each with his pint measure. . . .

“Gavarni laughed heartily over an article of phrenological biography lately published about him, an article in which, while allowing him the bump of *sensitiveness*, they emphatically denied him that of *veneration*. ‘You see, Messieurs,’ cried he, ‘’tis cruel, but ’tis true, I haven’t a ha’porth of veneration!’”

The last entry in the December of 1856 puts on record the significant fact that Edmond and Jules de Goncourt had sold, to the Paris publisher Dentu, their *Portraits Intimes* for the sum of three hundred francs (£12), they having spent over the material which went to compose the two volumes some thousands of francs. Yet this was a distinct advance on their previous plan of publishing at their own expense.

To Aurélien Scholl, who, in consequence of a duel, had been condemned to a month's imprisonment, Jules writes on Christmas Eve:—"Last night I dreamt that I had gone to join you, having been given a month for having boxed the ears of an unknown gentleman. I saw the door of the prison, a group of our friends and your kindly greeting. However, I have boxed no one's ears, and, thank God, it is you, dear fellow, who are coming to me. . . .

"It is difficult for me to say anything to you of a consoling nature, for you are in prison, and I am at liberty. I cannot even tell you a funny story, for the sky is grey, and we have condemned ourselves to remain indoors and work.

"Are you doing anything? Do you find that your imagination can trot up and down even behind prison bars? The hours must seem tortoises, and old Time, bereft of his wings, sadly paralytic."

The year 1857 opened well for the two brothers, and the publication of their book on the Eighteenth Century brought them many new friends and appreciative readers.

Jules notes somewhat sadly the gradual disappearance of old family ties. Instead of the many duty calls he used once to pay on New Year's day, only an uncle and an old cousin, Mademoiselle de Courmont, remain; and the brothers found the latter *vieille demoiselle* awaiting their visit in what was practically a workman's dwelling. "And yet," exclaimed Jules, "she is the granddaughter of a woman who possessed three millions beside Charolais, and the châteaux of Clichy and Bondy; the silver dishes on which this lady's roast game were brought to table were so heavy that two footmen could scarcely carry them. But all this wealth was turned into paper money, and Elizabeth Lenoir, who formerly went by the name of the silver heiress, and whom Monsieur de Courmont married for her fortune, died in a garret with nobody near her but an old dog, and was buried in a pauper's grave. Our cousin only inherited a small life annuity, and a vault in the Montmartre Cemetery, which, being paid for in advance, is her actual property."

Early in January the brothers met, in a newspaper office, Théophile Gautier, "a heavy face and weary expression, a sleepy physiognomy which wakes up at intervals, and takes a part in what is going on just in the same intermittent manner in which a deaf man takes in words—with hallucinations of hearing which makes him give his attention to what is being said behind him when he is really being addressed in front. . . .

"He repeated constantly the sentence, 'Form

always gives birth to thought,' and lingered lovingly on the phrase. Flaubert said it to him this morning, and he looks upon it as the formula of his school, and wishes it could be engraven on all the walls. Then he gave those round him an account of how he spends his working days. 'I should never wake up in the morning were it not that I dream of Gargantuan repasts, and wake up hungry. After breakfast I smoke. As I get up at half-past seven, this brings me to eleven o'clock. Then I drag forward an arm-chair, place on the table all the instruments of torture, the paper, the pen, and the ink; I have always hated writing, it is so useless! Then I begin to write solemnly, like a public writer. . . . I do not work quickly, but I never stop, for I do not stay to choose my words . . . or think over what I am going to say. I take up my pen and write. I am a man of letters, and should know my business. When I am sitting in front of paper and ink, I am like the clown on his trapeze. And then I have my own system of syntax. I throw my phrases up in the air, as if they were kittens, and they always fall on their feet. It is very simple, one need only have good syntax. I would engage to teach any one the art of writing. I might open a class for teaching young people in twenty-five lessons how to write leaders. Look, here is some of my "copy:" you see there is not an erasure.' "

Théophile Gautier, with his overwhelming personality, brilliant originality, and genius, played a great part in the de Goncourts' life, and in their

diary may be found the best and most living descriptions of the author of *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, but which throw a painful light on French journalism during the Empire.

Early in the winter of 1857, Flaubert's publication of *Madame Bovary* led to his being pursued as having written a work contrary to public morals. Thanks to his able counsel, M. Sénard, he was acquitted, but the trial made a profound impression on his fellow-writers, especially on Gautier, who when discussing the matter exclaimed, "I am ashamed of my profession. For the sake of the slender sum I earn, and without which I should starve, I am forced to suppress at least the eighth part of what I think, at the risk of being dragged before the courts."



## CHAPTER VII

Year 1857—Publication of *Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*—Letters from Jules to Saint-Victor and Gavarni—Various conversations with Flaubert, Feydeau, Gautier, Gavarni—*Hommes de Lettres*—Death of Gavarni's son Jean—Napoleon the Third's literary labours—Baudelaire—The year 1858—Passages from the diary—Rachel's house described by Jules—Guys of the *Illustrated London News*—Jules Lecomte.

“MARCH 16.—To-day appeared our volume of *Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*. Barrière scolds us for wasting our talent on small and unimportant subjects. What the public wants, he says, are solid and compact works, in which may be recognised figures often met with previously, and which contain well-known stories. Anecdotes, which have not yet received the sanction of time, are apt to scare this same public ; documents, hitherto unpublished, frighten them ; a history of the Eighteenth Century, as we understand it, slowly unravelled by means of a series of autograph letters and documents, showing the various tendencies and different sides of the epoch : an original, freshly written history, differing from those which have already appeared ; such a work will not bring us in the twentieth part of what an ordinary com-

pilation, in which we should have floundered through miles of beaten and hackneyed ground, would yield. . . ."

The *Portraits Intimes du XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle* is a book mainly composed of original matter, and extracts from letters and diaries written by personages of minor, though important, historical interest, joined together by an almost invisible thread of narrative. For instance, the volume contains a very interesting and instructive memoir by the Marquis de Calvière, a member of the Royal Household, on the youth of Louis XV.; the boy king portrayed in his daily life, in his amusements, in his freaks and sulks; the man who did so much to bring about the great Revolution, shown, so to speak, at the source.

Saint-Victor, the critic of the *Presse*, wrote, when the *Portraits Intimes* were first published, an enthusiastic review of the book. Said he, "It is a volume full of dreams and fantasies, and resembles one of those delicately enamelled cabinets, encrusted with medallions on which Time has set his seal, and which have come down to us intact in beauty and full of the romance of a past period. The silver key is turned in the sculptured lock, and a whole treasure is let free—the loves, the secrets, the letters of great men, and epistles penned by fair ladies full of unveiled passion, bearing the trace of tears, and showing how the hands trembled as they wrote."

The two young authors were greatly delighted,

and on the 11th of May 1858, they wrote this note to their critic :—

"MY DEAR SAINT-VICTOR,—We know not how to thank you ; but we wish to tell you that we are happy to be your debtors, proud that to all the former links between us, to that sympathy of taste and mental friendship, you have now added one of the heart, which commands our gratitude.

"EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT."

The *Portraits Intimes* were also noticed by another well-known man of letters, M. de Lescure, in the *Gazette de France*, and the volume went through several editions, but the authors thoroughly revised each monograph, and the later issues of the book are much more complete.

"*March 19th.*—X— came to see us this morning. The woman he loves has written to tell him that, weary of his tyrannical affection, she no longer cares for him at all, and that in order to utterly destroy any hope of a reconciliation, she gives him to understand that she has taken another lover. Hence tears, some fine verses written on the spur of the moment, bursts of dull fury, and threats of blows and duels. . . .

". . . In the modern young man of letters there is a curious combination of the literary and dramatic element : his very existence seems full of the incidents which went to compose the life of

eighteenth century adventurers. His emotions are always strained to the utmost, and he suffers the perpetual martyrdom of a nervous organisation, always fatally attracted by all that causes him pain, and to that which finally destroys his powers of thought by day and his sleep by night."

During this winter, almost immediately after the publication of their book, the elder brother had a short illness, and during his convalescence he and Jules amused themselves by ransacking the quays and the *Marché du Temple*, in hopes of discovering a set of old tapestries in keeping with a fine suit of Beauvais furniture lately bought by them. At last, after many pleasant but fruitless expeditions, they came across what they had long looked for, a fine piece of Gobelins.

With Gavarni the de Goncourts' intimacy greatly increased about this time, and Jules constantly cheered his old friend by amusing notes.

"DEAR SIR AND FRIEND,—Messrs. Edmond and Jules, men of letters, having a great deal to do, and no time during the whole blessed week to go and see their dear Gavarni, invite him and his heir to dine with them on Tuesday. Excuses not accepted. We count upon you.

"This family gathering will be delightful; every one will be merry, and the conversation will be specially choice. The chandelier will not be lighted, but on the other hand, Monsieur and

Madame Leroy will lend the lustre of their presence. There will perhaps be some lobster! This is still doubtful; but we are ready to make any sacrifices in order to see once more our long lost friend. . . ."

On the 10th of April Jules puts on record in the diary a curious conversation overheard at a newspaper office.

"At five o'clock we met, at the office of *L'Artiste*, Gautier, Feydeau, and Flaubert; Feydeau is chiefly conspicuous for a self-infatuation and belief in his work, so simple and obviously childish that one cannot help being disarmed. Apropos of the publication of *Les Saisons*, of which a number is to appear at each solstice, he said to Gautier, "I hope you think it is a gem, because I shouldn't like to dedicate anything to you that wasn't of the first water!"

Whereupon there arose a fierce and noisy discussion on the subject of metaphors. Massillon was quoted, and the phrase, "His opinions had no cause to blush for his conduct," was passed by Flaubert and Gautier; but Lamartine's, "He delighted in riding on horseback—that pedestal of Princes," was condemned by all present.

From metaphors they passed on to the question of tautologies. Flaubert maintained they ought to be avoided at all costs, even though you spend a week in seeking a synonym. Then Flaubert and Feydeau, with many gestures and much raising of voice,

told each other various little trade secrets, exposing, with emphasis and earnestness, various possible and impossible theories as to literary methods, and the means by which a man may always attain the writing of good prose.

In short, so much importance is given to the clothing, colouring, and texture of the idea, that the thought about to be expressed becomes a mere peg on which to hang sounding phrases. . . .

“*April 16th.*—Gavarni dropped in to lunch and held forth: ‘When women go anywhere they carry little bits of work about with them, some crochet, or a scrap of wool work. Well, I have invented a very simple little instrument by which you can find *integrals*, and I always carry it about with me; it is very convenient: I am taking a walk, for instance, after I leave your house—hey presto—I find an *integral*—it is a fine thing to be in possession of a large number of *integrals*; you never know, the collection may sell very well after your death.’ . . .

“Then he went on to speak of the curious attraction he has always felt for subterranean galleries leading into mountains, the openings of caves, and those extinct volcanoes, in whose depths lie cradled night and mystery. He has often gone down into these places holding to a rope suspended from a tree; it was thus that he discovered on the Pyrenees a magnificent stalactite grotto, which is now constantly visited by tourists. But his curio-

sity and imagination were roused by an opening which is to be found on a plateau among the mountains of Bagnières, I believe it is called *Le Casque de Lères*. However many stones you throw down this place you do not hear them fall. "Why," he asked, "has no one ever cared to be let down in a basket? It would be well worth the trouble. There was some mystery there which seemed to lure me on. I should like to have concocted a story out of that black pot, showing how I went down and found at the bottom an old sage who knew everything, even the Promethean secret of bringing the dead to life. His valet should have been a Roman General, killed in some battle in the vicinity, and to whom the sage had restored the vital spark, only endowing him, however, with the intelligence necessary for cleaning his laboratory."

The following sentences give a vivid idea of Jules de Goncourt's nature.

"I should like to have a room flooded with sunshine, the furniture bathed in light, and hung with old tapestries, whose colours should have faded under a Southern sun. There I would dwell, full of golden ideas, possessed of a warm heart, a mind brimful of sunshine, and at peace. How strange it is that as you grow old the sun becomes dear to you, nay, almost necessary, and the dying ask that the window may be opened in order that the god of light may close their eyes."



JULES DE GONCOURT  
 From a Water Colour Sketch by Edmund de Goncourt, 1857







"*May* 12.—Théophile Gautier told us to-day that when he wished to write exceptionally well, he always began his work in verse, because there was a feeling of uncertainty in his mind respecting prose, as to whether it would turn out a success; whereas, just as a medal is struck once for all, verses, if good, come out in one piece; but he added that the exigencies of life had more than once turned the stories which he had begun in verse into prose. . . .

"*May* 20.—What a grievously elaborate torture one must undergo to keep up beauty. We heard the process described by a woman in Society. She gets up at half-past six, sits by the window till half-past eight, in order that her complexion may enjoy an air bath for an hour and a half; then she takes an ordinary bath lasting an hour, and after breakfast she lies down for a time, her face isolated from all contact. . . ."

Although not published till three years later, the brothers spent the early spring of 1857 in writing the first portion of *Les Hommes de Lettres*, a painfully realistic study of the literary circles in which they themselves were living. The story was first written in what was destined to be one of its ultimate forms, namely, as a comedy.

". . . Our play, *Hommes de Lettres*, is nearly finished; building unstable castles in the air, we tell each other that if it brings us in money, that is, a great deal of money, we shall play ducks and

drakes with it, laugh at it, abuse it, waste it on follies. We who believe that it is beyond the power of money to procure a single sensation, or one drop of happiness, should only experiment with money, outdoing the fool in folly of spending, essaying the limits of our originality between four walls, showing the specific lightness of a large sum. . . .”

“*June 1.*—Nothing ever begins over again in this world, and man should never desire a second time what he has once found good. To-day, in Maire’s Restaurant, the *Écrevices Bordelaises* were not a success. Ah me! about the year ’50, in the days when Maire was a common wine-seller, possessing behind his zinc counter only one tiny room, where, by dint of squeezing, you could get in six people, and old Father Maire did his own waiting, the food was served on real plate to those whose culinary taste was worth consideration. I remember the haricot mutton flavoured with mushroom, and a certain dish of truffled macaroni, the delicacy of which it is impossible to describe, washed down with several bottles of that splendid minor Burgundy, once in the cellar of Louis Philippe. . . .

“*June 4.*—To-day, at the Hotel Drouot, I saw the first sale of photographs. Everything turns to black in our days, and photography is the dusky garment in which things clothe themselves. . . .

“*June 7.*—The conversation turned on the subject of the Emperor’s mistresses, on the Castiglione, and the jealousy of the Empress. You all remember the

*mot* of Constance about the Emperor—‘If I had only resisted, to-day I should have been an Empress!’ . . .

“*June 11.*—If the public only knew how dearly we pay for a little notoriety; the insults, the outrageous calumnies, the sickness of body and mind which befall us, then truly their envy would turn to pity. . . .”

Edmond and Jules spent the latter part of June at Croissy, in the château which was so long in the possession of a member of their family. There, work and worry were forgotten, and the younger brother, whose health had already begun to give way, mentions with delight the pleasure afforded him by the great silent park, studded with the lime-trees for which Seine-et-Oise is famous.

Their stay in the country was much saddened by the death of their old friend. Gavarni’s little son Jean, which occurred on the 17th of June, within a few days of the de Goncourts’ departure from Paris. “My friend,” writes Jules on hearing of the terrible blow which had struck the great caricaturist, “we do not feel we can intrude on your grief. We only press your hand: in a few days we will come and see you. . . .”

“*July 5.*—We have been to see poor Gavarni, who lost his son Jean during our absence. We found him stricken down with grief, and, according to his own expression, ‘having lost all courage for doing or living.’

"He told us that Andral had seen his son the day before, but had thought his condition offered no cause for alarm. 'In the morning,' continued Gavarni, 'he suddenly fixed his eyes on mine, doubtless without seeing me, eyes that were larger than I had seen them, the pupil just like this,' and he showed us the size on his thumb nail. 'I took his hand, it was beginning to grow cold. A great look of surprise came over his face, his hand became icy, all was over. I wished to wear out my grief. . . . I did not leave this place, I could never have returned.' After a moment's silence he added, 'I idolised that child. It was a mania, a madness. I was always afraid. When I came home, after getting out of my gondola, my eyes instinctively went to the window, I was always dreading some accident, expecting to see a crowd gathered—I know not what. Ah! yes, it was a mania. But it has this good side to it, nothing now matters; the neighbours may scream themselves hoarse; the house may burn to the ground: I am absolutely reckless: I may even break my neck.' . . .

"He stopped. We took a turn round the garden.

"'By the way, Gavarni, that is rather a bare spot.'

"'Ah, well! what would you have me do! It was there my boy played at ball.'

"And then he said—

"'Of course the school (he had let his house to a schoolmaster in order to remain near his child)—

the school will have to move now. I told the master that if he would only go away within a fortnight he need not trouble to pay me anything.' . . ."

During the summer of 1857 the de Goncourts lost their father's only brother, the worthy *Représentant* described in an earlier chapter; and after a brief sojourn at Neufchateau, where this de Goncourt of another generation had spent his old age, they wandered about Switzerland in search of fresh air, September finding them once more at Croissy.

"August 23.—Mürger tells us of the post-mortem eulogy pronounced on Planche by Buloz, 'I would sooner have lost 20,000 francs.'

"The truth is that old Buloz really shed tears over his friend, who, though he may have had a horror of cold water, had nevertheless a noble and disinterested character. . . .

"When Louis Napoleon was at Ham, writing pot-boiling books, he used to send his 'copy' for revision to Madame Cornu. This lady, who was connected with the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, always confided the manuscripts to Planche, who gave both time and hard work to correcting and preparing them for the press. Louis Napoleon heard of this, and when he became President, he offered Planche the post of Director of Fine Arts; the latter refused the offer. . . .

"Just re-read Balzac's *Paysans*. Nobody has ever called Balzac a statesman, and yet he was perhaps

the greatest statesman of our time, the only one who sounded the depths of our discomfort, the only one who, as from a higher plane, realised the loss of social balance, the state of morals *versus* laws, which had supervened in France since 1789; and it is a novelist who saw and understood truly all that had occurred. . . ."

After their return to Paris—

"*October.*—The Café Riche seems to have become, for the time being, the camp of literary dandyism. It is strange to see how entirely the public frequenting a given place are influenced by their surroundings; bohemians are afraid of the white and gold, and red velvet; besides, their great man, Mürger, is renouncing his old gods, and passing over bag and baggage to the bourgeoisie and the world on the other side; his friends are crying out against the apostasy and treason of this new Mirabeau.

"Baudelaire supped beside us this evening. He had no cravat, he was barenecked, his head was shaven, and he seemed equipped for the guillotine. And yet he was full of the latest dandyism; his little hands were well washed, his nails pared, and as well cared for as those of a woman; withal, the head of a maniac, a voice as piercing as steel, and an elocution suggesting a happy imitation of St. Just. He denied obstinately, and with a certain bitter anger, that he ever outraged public morals. . . ."

The year 1858 commenced anything but auspiciously for the de Goncourts. At a New Year's supper party a friend warned them that they were not looked on with favour by the Government; and once again they felt tempted to throw themselves into voluntary exile. But Brussels had lost much of its charm; Jules and Edmond had become thoroughly Parisian, both in associations and tastes, and, as was well known, the Imperial bark was worse than the Imperial bite.

"*February 13.*—I called on a young man of my acquaintance—he was sitting by the fireside with a bad cold, and spending his evening in the following fashion:—Before him lay spread out a leaflet, in other words, the prospectus of M. Wafflard, the great undertaker. This paper contained a price list of every style of funeral: nothing was left out—death's visiting card, the number of priests, candles, and pall fringes, all were mentioned, and there was an engraving at the top of each page, in order that you might know exactly what you were going to get for your money.

"I looked through the leaflet, and found on the margin a pencilled calculation, amounting to four thousand and some hundred francs, a calculation which his father, who came in to wish him good-night, looked at and then burst out laughing—the paternal sceptic had understood.

"When his father had gone, as I did not gather the meaning of the situation, I asked him, 'For



whose funeral, the devil take me, are you making out that calculation.?' 'For that of my father,' replied my young friend coolly.

"The greatest comedian could scarcely have imagined a thing more grotesquely horrible; to sit down by one's fireside, and, by way of forgetting one's cold, make out calmly, and in cold blood, the invoice of one's father's funeral—he being in perfect health! And note further, that my young friend had thought over everything when drawing up his estimate; propriety and economy were both considered, also his father's social position, the uselessness of unnecessary expense—a second-class funeral, but a first-class burial service. . . ."

"*March 5.*—Spendthrifts, fools and madmen, are strange beings. If an inheritance falls to them they suddenly become sober, wise, and economical, calculating everything to the last farthing. X—, an absolute type of the prodigal son, is now rejoicing in the possession of a fortune. Yesterday he opened a drawer of his writing-table in presence of his friends, showed them fifteen hundred franc notes, fingered them several times, sighed, and put them all back in the drawer, saying, 'I know I owe you all money, but strange as it may seem, it annoys me to pay it you back! Will you take it out in a supper?'

"*March 12.*—This evening the conversation turned on 1830; and the Marquis de Belloy, in order to give us an idea of the comradeship existing in

those days between friends, and of the eccentric, though often noble and generous state of things which then obtained, told us this story : Some time previous to the production of *Marion Delorme*, he wrote a letter to a friend, then a medical student in the provinces : the friend, judging from the tone of the epistle that the Marquis was perhaps sad and out of funds, scraped together what money he could and came to Paris. De Belloy, having no need of assistance, thanked him, asked him to stay a few days, and took him to spend the evening with his mistress. Then followed for a time a merry *vie à trois*. One fine day de Belloy missed his friend, and somewhat anxious went off to see him. He found a monster ! The medical student had shaved off hair, eyebrows, beard and moustache, and confessed to Belloy that having fallen in love with the latter's inamorata, he wished to place himself under the impossibility of seeing her. During the evening of the same day de Belloy persuaded this model friend to accompany him to the first performance of *Marion Delorme*, with consequences which threatened to be fatal to that drama, for each time the poor fellow turned round to applaud, his enthusiastic but ghastly countenance made the whole audience burst into roars of laughter. . . ."

Rachel had died on the 3rd of January. Three months later, Jules de Goncourt went over the great actress's house in the Place Royale.

"April 11. —I followed the crowd upstairs; first came a large room, dimly lighted from a courtyard: all round this apartment were placed, in various crushed and wretched attitudes, clothes which had belonged to the dead—a woman's wardrobe, a queen's trousseau—evening wraps of white satin, the robes of *Athalie*, and all the poor little odds and ends of finery which had once covered that slender figure; here were all the costumes of her departed glory hung as on the walls of a Morgue. . . .

"The clothes-dealers walked round, examining the once proud but now shabby apparel, as if they thought to find the spot through which the brother's sword had pierced *Camille's* tunic. 'Pass on, gentlemen and ladies!' cried the shrill voice of an usher, who emphasised his words by pushing the bewildered crowd along by their shoulders.

"Close by was the silver, and the champagne ice pails, certainly not designed by Meissonier or Germain; three travelling bags, some wretchedly bound books, diamonds, a jewel casket designed after the Etruscan models in the Vatican and the Barberini Museum; a gipsy set of ornaments composed of common stones; a hideous china dessert service, and a coffee set of modern Sèvres. . . .

"'Pass on, ladies and gentlemen,' shrieked the same voice once more. And then came the drawing-room, an apartment worthy of an upholsterer of the Marais. Then to the bedroom, with its little black wooden bed, and blue silk curtains; and all

about the apartment, on the bed, the sofa, chairs, were scattered fine pieces of lace, English point-lace flounces, Mechlin frilling, and handkerchiefs from Valenciennes, which an old hag at the head of the bed was busy examining.

“‘Pass on,’ said the same voice once more. . . .

“*E tutto.* And this is what Rachel left behind her—diamonds, jewels, silver, laces, ill-bound books, and modern Sèvres. . . .”

“*April 23.*—We came back from Gavarni with Guys, the draughtsman of the *Illustrated London News*, a little man with an energetic face and grey moustache, who walks with a limp, and ceaselessly pulls up his sleeves with the flat of his hands over his bony arms; diffusive, full of parenthesis, zigzagging from one idea to another, going off the rails, losing, then finding himself again, arresting your attention with a slang metaphor, a word borrowed from the language of the German philosophers or a learned technical term of art or industry, and always holding you under the spell of such a pictorial form of speech that it makes things described seem concrete, visible. While walking he evoked a thousand memories, throwing in from time to time snatches of irony, sketches, landscapes, descriptions of towns riddled by bullets, men bleeding, disembowelled, and ambulances where the rats crawled about the wounded.

“Then on the reverse side, as if in an album, or at the back of a drawing, one discovers a thought worthy of Balzac. This devil of a man gave

us social silhouettes, glimpses of the French, and the English type, which were quite new and fresh, not having got mouldy in books; satires lasting two minutes, pamphlets compressed into a word, a treatise on the comparative philosophy of the national genius of races. . . ."

About this time the brothers made the close acquaintance of Charles Edmond the critic, and his wife.

"*Sunday, May 9.*—We dined at Bellevue with the Charles Edmonds in a tiny cottage full of light and gaiety, a real little nest with a garden the size of a basket, and where there is only room for flowers. . . .

"Apropos of — and his book, some one happens to quote the words of Montrond, Talleyrand's wild friend, whom a priest asked on his deathbed whether he had ever blasphemed the Church. 'Monsieur le Curé, I have always lived in good society!' . . ."

"*June 6.*—A dinner at the keeper's house in the forest of Saint Germain—Saint-Victor, Mario Uchard, Aurélien Scholl, and Jules Lecomte.

"Jules Lecomte, the man we caught sight of in the shadowy light of his study, and whose appearance struck us then as cold, sharp, and mysteriously intimidating, gave us the impression, when we saw him in the daylight, of some bourgeois suffering from a fit of remorse, or from a deep-seated disease.

"He looked as if he carried his past on his

shoulders, and seemed possessed with the discomfort and reserve felt by a man who does not wish to stretch out his hand without feeling quite sure that there is some one to grasp it; yet he inspired one with sympathy and a kind of pity.

"The man is full of anecdotes, which he pulls out as if they were slides, and which he relates without any sort of excitement, and much in the same tone as if he were reading an official report. Though devoid of all literary taste, he is the only writer who can to-day be said to be a general press paragraphist; he is the only man who has the slightest knowledge of what is going on everywhere, or of what is being said and done, the only individual who keeps his ears open elsewhere than in the *Café du Helder*, or in the narrow literary coteries. He stands on tiptoe at the half-opened door of society—indeed of all societies, from that of the courtesan to that of the diplomat; listening, cross-questioning, and reading that daily diary of contemporary life which never gets printed.

"He has often tried, so he told us, to collect members of every profession round his table, hoping that each specialist would divulge his secrets to the other, and that all the intimate and hidden history of Paris would come out during dessert from the lips of a banker, a doctor, and a man of law. 'Do you know,' said Lecomte, 'why Vernon sold his collection? He believes that things will come to an end to-morrow, or the day after, and as he considers himself one of those who helped to bring

about the events of the 2nd of December, and that, in fact, there is a price put upon his head—he imagines that everything he possesses will be ground to dust, and so he has sold everything. Nothing is left in his house except his bed, an arm-chair, and a trunk.' . . ."

## CHAPTER VIII

Publication of *L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette*—Michelet's opinion of the book—Gavarniana—Flaubert—Orsini's love of Italy—Description of About—The room in which Napoleon the First planned 18 Brumaire—The de Goncourts' groom.

ON the 19th of June *L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette* was published by Firmin Didot, and four days later Jules noted with delight that the book must already be attracting attention, as the Dutch Embassy had sent for three copies.

The excellent work of the two brothers upon the periods of the Revolution and the Directoire had nevertheless not prepared the public for the historical genius shown in their life of Marie Antoinette. Always curious and accurate in their researches, they had not hitherto struck the note of human feeling, and needed the inspiration of such a subject to help them clothe dry bones with life.

In estimating this *chef-d'œuvre*, it must be remembered that the life of the unfortunate queen had not yet been written as a whole. The tragedy was well within the memory of men and women of eighty, when the de Goncourts put pen to paper. Madame d'Angoulême died as late as 1851, and her piteous references to "my mother," the anniversary of whose death, 16th of October, she kept for sixty



years in seclusion, fasting, and weeping, were sufficient to remove the subject from the domain of mere literature or history. It was the brothers de Goncourt who first in France threw upon a literary canvas the portrait of Marie Antoinette as a whole figure, nor have any documents which have since seen the light discredited their conception of Louis XVI.'s queen. There are points in her history which cannot be elucidated, and mysteries which are of slight consequence. Historians of every shade of opinion admit that when the day of trouble came she rose to meet it with extraordinary courage; and that her last will, addressed to her sister-in-law the Princess Elizabeth, was a model of clearness and resignation.

Michelet, when he had brought down his history of France to the reign of Louis XV., referred to the careful use of documents made by the de Goncourts, and to their feeling for the spirit and local colour of the year when the Dauphine came as a young girl to the court of her husband's grandfather; and Sainte-Beuve, when treating of the negotiations of Marshal Saxe, says, that of the Dauphine he will trace no portrait after the "masterly work" of the Messrs. de Goncourt. "She roused them to a rare enthusiasm, and they have devoted their best powers to give her a place in history as woman, queen, and martyr."

From Croissy, where they were spending a month, they watched the progress made by their book, and occasionally paid a flying visit to town.

"*July 6.*—At Saint-Victor's, 49 Rue de Grenelle Saint Germain, at the back of a large court, there is a little room of which the walls are covered with facsimile drawings by Raphael and the great Italian masters. Our host suddenly appeared, his hair wild and uncombed, actually and metaphorically *en déshabillé*, yet withal a charming fellow, as handsome in his graceful untidiness as a youth of the Renaissance. . . ."

And somewhat later, speaking of the same friend—

"Considering the state of current literature, Saint-Victor presents a very fine literary type; he dwells in the atmosphere of rarified art; he soars in the region of high ideas and great problems; he broods lovingly on Greece, with a longing to explore her wonders; he bursts into a description of India, which he has never seen with his own eyes except under the influence of opium; he is carried away by the fire of his own words, and he describes, in profound and impressive language, the origin of all religions springing from the grandest and most primitive questionings of humanity; he shows an eager curiosity in exploring the cradles of the world, the constitution of societies."

"*October 28.*—M. de Vailly, who knows no more of us than we do of him, made, in an article published lately by *L'Illustration*, a prediction respecting us, which may perhaps be realised. He

maintains that if we fall in love we shall feel affection for the same person, and that both the laws and customs should make an exception in favour of our phenomenal duality!"

The Messieurs de Goncourt were already hard at work on a new series of historical studies.

The beginning of the year 1859 saw a second edition of *L'Histoire de Marie Antoinette*.

"*January 7.*—After an absence of seven or eight months Pouthier has made up his mind to come back and dine with us. He leads every day a more and more fantastic existence. He lives in the Rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, in a masons' lodging-house, and at five o'clock every morning he is awakened by the sawing of the wood which is to light the fire, the falling of the logs, the blowing up of the fire, the workmen's departure for their work: a few hours later he hears the lodgers' little brats tumbling downstairs in the huge cast-off shoes of their fathers and mothers

"There were days in his life when he remained in bed, striving to cheat hunger with a cigarette; and as a sort of consolation, he relates that a man sleeping in the same room, and even more destitute than himself, remained in bed two days without eating anything. . . . and the horrible part of it was that he, Pouthier, heard the other dreaming that he was revelling in meals of three courses. . . .

"And yet the more I look about me, the more I

respect this fellow. It is true he likes to wallow in the mire, but at least he is loyal to his aversions, and will not fawn to any one to secure an order. He is apt to be trite and somewhat low, but he has delicacy of feeling, he revolts against borrowing, and in spite of his misery is incapable of harbouring any feeling of hatred or envy against those whom the world treats well. He does not, as some do, rant of 'My mother, my mother;' he even declares filial sentiment to be humbug; nevertheless, he sent his mother half of the small amount he earned this year, and when she wrote, cursing him for not going to see her at Saint Germain on New Year's day, he answered, 'I could not come, because . . . well, perhaps I can explain it best by saying, as I am paying for the postage of this letter, I shall have to give up my pipe for the day.' . . .

"January 27.—Our novel, *Les Hommes de Lettres*, is finished; we have now only to copy it out. It is curious to note that in literature, when you have once given birth to a thing, it no longer seems a part of yourself; you no longer bear it in your heart, nor do you feel the necessity of keeping it as it were in life; it therefore becomes almost a stranger to you. You feel indifferent, bored, and sometimes even disgusted by your book. That is what we have been feeling during the last few days."

This study of the literary Paris of 1850-1860 was based on the play which the brothers had not suc-

ceeded in placing in any theatre, but though finished during the winter of 1859, the novel was not published till the following year.

“*Friday, Jan. 28.*—Gavarni came in towards the end of dinner: he was not hungry, and had just lunched, though it was seven o'clock! This was very characteristic; he has a mind quite above all material delights, and the only pleasure he enjoys, the sole recreation he allows himself from his terrible work, is the conversation of those he styles the wealthy, namely, the beings who have drunk deep at the well of knowledge, as, for instance, Guys, Aussandon, &c. &c., those complex and original spirits who are in themselves a perfect fund of information, and whose life, according to Gavarni, ‘is spent in being a source of study and delight to the intellects of those who sit with them over their wine, and this although they leave no record either in literature or painting.’” Just now Gavarni makes a point of dining at the *Taverne Anglaise*, because the proprietor of that restaurant exposes for his benefit the various sleights-of-hand by which pickpockets commit thefts in cafés.

“He is tired, for he has been going round lately to all the bankers, Rothschild, &c., to effect a loan of 50,000 francs (£2000), on his house at Point du Jour. He found bankers as hard as they are proverbially said to be. Most trying to him was the fact that the Credit Foncier, to whom he appealed as a last resource, put him off for a month; yet he

feels no bitterness, only annoyance, at being obliged to lay his ordinary work aside.

"Passing through the Rue Montesquieu before a tailor's shop—

"‘By the way, I must buy a pair of trousers.’

"We go in and are shown upstairs.

"‘I want a dark, warm pair of trousers.’

"They take his measurements.

"‘I understand nothing at all about this sort of thing. Do you think they will fit me? How much is it?’

"‘Twenty-six francs.’

"He pays down the money and carries off his trousers under his arm.

"We go into a dark little café and fall into conversation about a project which has been already discussed, namely, that of publishing a large illustrated work on the Imperial Court.

"‘I have often thought of it myself,’ he exclaimed. Then he told us there had been some talk recently about re-designing the costume of the Imperial ‘*Garde*,’ something after the style of the Horse Guards. ‘I was the only one who could have done it, and I should not have given them a fancy dress costume. But bodily idleness overcomes me completely . . . a physical idleness which increases in direct proportion to the activity of the mind.’

"‘M. Guillaume!’

"At this call from the waiter, Gavarni gets up and shakes our hand. ‘M. Guillaume’ is the name by which he is known here. . . .

"At the Café Riche there was next to me an old man. The waiter, after having enumerated the list of dishes, asked him which he desired to have. 'Alas,' said the old man, 'I desire the power to desire.' He was age in person . . . was this old man. . . ."

"*April 27.*—We are plunged in the blackest, deepest, most intense dulness, . . . and yet from it we extract a certain bitter wild enjoyment. In our heart of hearts we are cherishing the idea of giving up our nationality, and taking refuge abroad, beginning life over again, as in the free-speaking Holland of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. . . . We should start a paper protesting against the actual state of things, we should speak out and break the seal that is upon our lips, and at last ease ourselves of our disgust by a cry of anger. We have had a vein of bad luck of late. Everything comes to an untimely end—all we undertake is a dismal failure. Our play, which the papers announced as being actually accepted, is now in the waste-paper basket. Our novel, which was already half written, has been returned to us. Added to this, we have had worries over the renewal of our farm leases, and have been physically very much below par.

"*May 11.*—There was a ring at the bell. Enter Flaubert, who, hearing that we had come across a huge mass of things supposed to be Carthaginian, had come to ask for the address of the collection. He then discoursed on his embarrassment about his

Carthaginian novel, *Salammbô*. He has absolutely no material, and is obliged to invent probabilities. And then, with the exuberant pleasure of a child in a toy-shop, he spent a happy hour examining our portfolios, our books, and our collections.

“Flaubert bears an astonishing resemblance to the portraits of the young Frédéric Lemaître. He is very tall and broad-shouldered, with large prominent eyes, full cheeks, rough drooping moustaches, and red weather-stained complexion. He spends four or five months in Paris, going nowhere, and only receiving a few friends, leading the unsociable life we all do—Saint-Victor following Flaubert’s example, and we following Saint-Victor’s.

“This bearishness, characteristic of the nineteenth century man of letters, is all the more curious when we compare it with the sociable life led by the writers of the eighteenth century, of which Diderot and Marmontel furnish a good example. The ‘*Bourgeoisie*’ of to-day only seeks out the man of letters when he is willing to play the rôle of wild beast, luffoon, or cicerone.

“*May 14.*—Charles Edmond, who has lived everywhere and known everybody, has a habit when in the midst of a chat, of suddenly opening a chapter of his memoirs, and producing some strange figure or characteristic anecdote. To-day he told us the following apropos the national susceptibility of the Italians

“‘Seven years ago he was at Nice, at the same time as Orsini, with whom he was somewhat



intimately acquainted. One morning Orsini invites him to lunch; he refuses the invitation, alleging, half in joke, that he is a carnivorous animal, and that Italians live on polenta and macaroni. Thereupon he goes off to call on a Russian Countess to whom Orsini was paying attention. Whilst he is there, a certain Count Pepoli, a common friend of both Orsini and of Charles Edmond, asks to have a few words with him in the ante-chamber. He then tells Edmond that Orsini has consecrated the whole of his life to Italy, that no more mortal injury can be done him than to offer insult to the Italian flag; and so he goes on, leading up to the point, which is that he is there in the capacity of second in a duel which is to be fought, and all on account of the polenta and macaroni! Thereupon the Countess comes upon the scene, and laughs so unmercifully at Orsini that he begins to be ashamed of his foolish susceptibility, and makes it up once more with Charles Edmond.

"*May 22.*—At Charles Edmond's we met About, and whilst walking in the Bellevue woods, he conversed in the most open and expansive manner. He has the intelligence of the man of the world, with a touch of the usher. He talked of himself, of his hair already turning grey; of his mother, his sister, his family, his castle in Savoy, his five servants, of the eighteen people who always sit down to his table, of his shooting, of his friend Sarcey de Suttières, whose book he describes as being like Balzac, only well written! He described

his disillusionment on re-reading *Notre Dame de Paris* last week, alluded to the qualities of Ponson du Terrail, whom with Merimée he placed very high. He is a type of the successful egoist, not a heavy insupportable egoist, for he is partly redeemed by certain witty monkey tricks, and by the gentle literary flatteries he addresses to the writers who are present. He quotes to their faces passages out of their books. But there is nothing in his conversations but what savours of the earth, of Paris, and of futile journalism.

“He spoke of his book *La Question Romaine*, which has just been seized. He told us, and we believed him, that the Emperor corrected the proofs, that Fould had a share in the work, and that Morny provided the end. . . . About added how Fould had confided to him that a suite of rooms was being prepared at Fontainebleau for the Pope—at Fontainebleau! in case the Holy Father showed any disposition to be spiteful, or if Antonelli played some trick! . . .

“We have engaged a fencing master, a real fencing master, one, such as George Sand might have brought into one of her novels. He is as ardent a Republican, and as wordy a philanthropist, as Sancho Panza, rustic in his tastes, loving the country like a true Parisian, and as industrious as a savage. Before he entered into possession of his hundred square yards of land at Creteil, he used to live in a luggage compartment shunted on to a piece of waste land. Fencing is the most

problematical science in the world—after that of politics.

“*June 22.*—These are the materials with which Napoleon boasted of founding a civilised society in Egypt :—

1. A troupe of actors.
2. A troupe of ballet girls.
3. A show of marionettes.
4. A hundred French women.
5. Doctors, surgeons, chemists.
6. Fifty gardeners.
7. Spirit dealers and distillers.
8. 200,000 pints of brandy.
9. 30,000 ells of blue and scarlet cloth.

“The populace takes its recreation in churchyards and pays calls in hospitals.”

“*October 15.*—Madame de Sang, who is General Lefèvre-Desnouette’s daughter, was kind enough to propose a visit to her Napoleonic Museum, Napoleon’s room in the house of the Rue de la Victoire, which was bequeathed to her father.

“The place in question had a sloping roof, and the door was not higher than a tall man. On a background of dark violet were Pompeian designs of a bluish white, and underneath a symbolical figure of the Legion of Honour.

“*Honneur et Patrie* on one side, a classical male head surmounted by an eagle; on the other a classical feminine head surmounted by a crocodile. The bed is of wood, painted so as to look like green bronze, the four posts are miniature cannons, and

from a spear hang curtains of the same colour as those of the window, with blue stripes, not unlike tent curtains. Beside the bed is a little mahogany chest of drawers, with bronze lions' heads, and rings passed through their throat. The desk on which the events of the 18th Brumaire were perhaps prepared is inlaid with two swords, also painted in green bronze. The chairs in the room are made in the shape of drums. . . .

"This room reveals the man as he was before Brumaire—even at that time theatrical and affected. The apartment looks like a scene in some wretched little provincial theatre."

Returning once more to their beloved Eighteenth Century, the de Goncourts found time to prepare for publication "*Les Mattresses de Louis XV.*," that is, the lives of the five women—the three sisters de Nesles, the Marquise de Pompadour, and Madame du Barry, who exercised the most influence on Louis *le bien aimé*. In the November of the same year, 1859, the brothers sold out part of their capital in order to pay for the printing of "*Hommes de Lettres*," which had in vain sought either theatrical manager or publisher.

"*Tuesday, November 13.*—For the first time in our lives, a woman has separated us for the space of thirty hours. The woman in question is Madame de Chateauroux, who obliges one of us to take a journey to Rouen, in order to copy a packet of her

private letters addressed to Richelieu: they form part of the Leber collection.

"Coming back I met Flaubert at the station, escorting his mother and niece, who are going to spend the winter in Paris. He is half way through with his Carthaginian novel. He told me of all he had to do in order to convince himself that he was writing the truth; he bemoaned the absence of a dictionary, for this obliges him to use circumlocution for nomenclature: he finds his difficulties increase as he goes on, and he is obliged to use his local colour sparingly to make it go far enough. . . ."

"*Towards the end of November.*—We have set up a groom. He wears a real livery, a green Russian greatcoat, coloured trousers, a white cravat, and a cockade. Rose says I am doing a true charity. His face suggests partly a monkey, partly a London gutter sparrow. He has a small head, and a small body. He seems to have all the low instincts of a hired coachman, a nurse, and of a beggar's child, in fact, he is the absolute type of his trade. Added to this he is a socialist, and full of anger against those who live on their income, or who are landed proprietors.

"Rose, under our influence, delivers grand speeches worthy of a Boulevard drama, and preaches to him the religion of honour in a corner of the kitchen."

"*December 15.*—We have come upon some oratorical fragments of Marat of Lyons, and no one has really given any true conception of the passion, the excitement, the fury, the 'delirium tremens' so to speak, of that period. The historians of the Revolu-

tion have hitherto been represented by cold journalists like M. Thiers, or by lyric poets like Lamartine. . . . And alas! the lack of intelligence in the painters.

"We have been absorbed for the last day or two in the 'Memoirs of Madame de Larochejacquelin.' What a book! It is a combination of the 'Iliad' and 'The Last of the Mohicans.' What graphic pictures! You can almost read the passage of the Nile in her passage of the Loire.

"Here we find the individual man standing out in sharp relief . . . as he did in olden times; war, as it is here described, becoming less the struggle between masses, and more the single combat of man and man. It is there you find the last of the heroes. The comic element softens the grim tragedy, when the remains of the army, reduced to rags, deck themselves out in turbans, and drape themselves in old skirts to be shot down. Yes, it is as it were the cast-off clothes of the Romans had fallen upon the shoulders of a Theban legion. And do you know what this retreat of the Ten Thousand suggested to our painters? why! priests mounting guard! . . .

"Are we well or ill organised? In every case we always see the ultimate result, the final outcome of a matter. Others throw themselves, like fools, without a moment's reflection, into an adventure. When we have a duel on hand, for instance . . . if we do not foresee our own death, we dwell on that of our adversary; we look ahead to the prison which

is before us, and we think over the allowance which we shall have to pay over to the family of the deceased! Our brains are always conjuring up the infinite possibilities of the unforeseen, the which possibilities scarcely ever occur to other minds. . . . Even in a glass of wine there lurk forebodings of to-morrow's headache. And yet all these considerations do not deter us from a necessary duel, a tempting siren, or a bottle of really good wine.

"Is this a misfortune after all? I think not. Though it poisons for a moment the enjoyment of the present, it prevents us from being disconcerted by any unforeseen event. We are always ready to go all lengths in what we have undertaken, our resolution is firm, our will is strong, and our patience is inured to the blows of chance."

## CHAPTER IX

Gavarniana—The beginnings of *Sœur Philomène*—Flaubert's criticism of Hugo—A letter from George Sand—Letters from Bar-sur-Seine—A tour through Germany—The true story of the Fall of Sebastopol.

AFTER the death of his son Jean, Gavarni became more and more intimate with his "*littreboit*," and both brothers considered it a pleasant duty to cheer and amuse their old friend.

Gavarni, though not forgotten, has gone out of date, and yet he is the creator of much that is strange and fantastic in modern French art. Of him Paul de Saint-Victor once wrote an eloquent description. "The wit, the fashions, the vices, the absurdities, the follies, the conventions of a whole epoch are judged, described, and condensed, not only in his drawing, but in his language, always full of racy simplicity and idiomatic power."

He is constantly referred to in the de Goncourts' diary, and perhaps the only faithful early portrait of the brothers was due to his pencil. The drawing shows us two young men sitting in profile side by side (a then very favourite way of painting or drawing two people)—Jules, looking worn and thin, wears his hair *à la Byron*, and his coat is cut according to the last mode of 1856. Both brothers have



the *effilé* refined look common to members of the old French *noblesse* from which they sprang, and they seem strangely out of place in this album, heading the series of certain noted journalists of the day ; and yet Gavarni had thought to do them great honour in placing them there. The caricaturist himself was one of the quaintest types the authors came across ; it was to his maternal uncle, Guillaume Thiemet, that he owed both his Christian name and his extraordinary talent. Thiemet was the Toole, the Corney Grain, and the Cruikshank of the latter end of the eighteenth century ; inexhaustible as mimic, as caricaturist, and as comic comedian.

Gavarni's father had been an old revolutionary republican, somewhat disgusted with the men of his time, but loyal to his old convictions. The youthful Gavarni got his lessons at the house of an architect whose wife spent her time reading the romances of Mrs. Ann Radcliffe ; and the boy early began to get his pocket money by selling little sepia sketches to a Demoiselle Naudet, a poor picture-dealer on what was then the Place du Carrousel. She introduced his work to Blaisot, an art publisher who flourished during the first years of the Restoration, and he ordered of the youthful artist "sets of devils," meaning thereby grotesques somewhat similar to the diabolic adornments of an old cathedral ; and Gavarni produced them regularly—insect devils, feathered devils, poor devils, and devils in pig-tailed perukes ; these personages,

however, not sufficing to gain the required income, he took to engraving for a living.

He is described by Gautier as having been in 1830 a charming young man with curly hair, and "as particular as an Englishman" about his dress, for he was beginning to earn enough to satisfy his fantasies of costume; and in 1832 he was in full swing, publishing his *Physionomie de la Population de Paris*, showing the soldiers, the children, the citizens, the policemen, the *Parisienne* as *grande dame* and *bourgeoise*, indoors and out, in curl papers and in ball dresses, yawning, laughing, asleep, awake; the *bourgeois gentilhomme*, and the *gentilhomme bourgeois*, the vagabonds making oratorical poses in the police courts, &c. Gavarni seized them all, threw them on paper, and his fame spread far and wide.

In 1847 he came to London, where he seems to have been quite anxiously expected, for at that time our social links with Paris were very close. But in England he did not get on very well; though he was most intelligently interested in all he saw. He snubbed Thackeray, who came full of zeal to invite him to dinner; he actually missed, without any excuse, an appointment to sketch the Queen, who, in common with Prince Albert, had the highest admiration for his genius; he was further said to have declared that an English lady in full dress was like a Cathedral! Finally he went off at a tangent on scientific notions, and, although the most sober of men, took what the de Goncourts whimsically style "*le gin du pays*," to stimulate his

researches into the higher mathematics! It was high time for him to get back to France, after an absence of something like two years, during which the Orleans monarchy had been replaced by the Republic and the Prince President. As has been recorded, it was at the end of 1851 that the two young de Goncourts first saw Gavarni, and found him deep in water-colour painting and Cartesian Philosophy; he took both brothers into his heart, and treated them with great kindness, telling them of all his adventures, and initiating them into all his theories and ideals, apparently believing in nothing but mathematics, essaying in vain to wring out the answer of the universe from what he called "the music of numbers."

After the death of his favourite son, his intellect took an extraordinary turn; he would discourse on scholastic philosophy and Louis Veuillot—by no means with disapproval. It seemed to be the only train of thought on which his mind could dwell with interest, though of course without belief; and in 1860 he was but the shadow of his former self. With difficulty Jules persuaded him to go once more to an Opera ball, but even during the supper which preceded this *partie fine*, he spent his time noting down on tiny scraps of paper the mathematical problems he had thought out on his way to the Rue Saint Georges.

"Behold him," wrote Jules de Goncourt on February the 4th, describing the evening, "ascending the grand staircase of the Opera, and plunging into the scene which he last witnessed fifteen years

ago. He hangs on my arm, lost in the crowd, as a king might lose himself in his own kingdom: he, Gavarni, who might well say, '*Le Carnaval, c'est moi.*'

"He studies with a certain interest the newest modes and fashions, and we spend an hour looking on at the dancing, and the gay throng of dominos and costumes . . . then, when he has seen everything, we bring him back to sleep with us. . . . He drags himself along, and walks up our staircase slowly, slowly; and as we are finally sitting settled in by the fire, he confides to us that when we left the Opera he had hardly strength left to put one foot before the other."

"*Sunday, February 5.*—We lunched with Flaubert. Bouillet told us the following pathetic story about a nun belonging to the hospital at Rouen, where he was a medical student. 'This sister cherished an affection, which he believes to have been purely platonic, for one of his fellow students. Well, this young man committed suicide by hanging himself. The Hospital Sisters were cloistered, and only came down into the courtyard on the days when they received Holy Communion. Bouillet was watching beside his dead friend when he saw the Sister come in, and kneel at the foot of the bed: he then heard her murmur a long prayer . . . she doing all this without taking the slightest notice of him. When she rose from her knees, Bouillet put into her hand a lock of the dead

man's hair which had been cut off for his mother; she took it without thanking him or uttering a word of any kind, and during the years they worked together the nun never alluded to what had occurred.' . . ."

The above story made a deep impression on the imaginations of both brothers, and suggested to them their novel *Sœur Philomène*, one of the first purely psychological realistic studies published in France.

"*March 4.*—We were discussing Hugo's '*Légendes des Siècles*' with Flaubert. What strikes him in this author, who claims to be a deep thinker, is the utter absence of any capacity for thought. Hugo, he maintains, is a naturalist and a philosopher; the sap of the trees has crept into his blood. . . . Flaubert speaks in scathing terms of Feuillet, and of the way in which he truckles to women in his works. 'This proves,' said Flaubert, 'that he does not care for the sex. Those who love woman write books in which they tell all they have suffered through her, for love is bred in suffering.' 'Perhaps,' we observed, 'this explains maternity.'

"The art of pleasing consists in never speaking of oneself and always talking to others of themselves. Every one is aware of this, yet how often is it forgotten.

"*March 10.*—I have just received from George Sand a charming letter apropos of our *Hommes de*

*Lettres.* To tell the truth, our book can only be said to have had a *succès d'estime*; it is not selling well. During the first few days of its publication we thought there would be a great demand for it. During the last fortnight only five hundred have sold, and I doubt if it will reach a second edition. Yet after all we are proud of our book; we feel sure it will live in spite of all, and notwithstanding the anger of the journalists; and to those who would like to ask us, 'Then you have a very good opinion of yourselves?' we would answer, 'A poor opinion when we consider ourselves, a very good opinion when we compare ourselves to others!'"

The letter written to the brothers by George Sand ran as follows:—

"MESSIEURS,—I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. I am a savage. I cannot make compliments, and am not even polite; therefore you may believe in the truth of what I am going to say. Your book is a very fine book, and you are possessed of an immense talent. I do not know if my saying this proves my utterance to be valid—many people tell me I have no literary judgment. I do not believe those people—one never does. Still I do not pose as a judge. I impart to you my impressions and my convictions, take them for what they are worth. What a terrible world you have introduced me to; is it really as bad as that? If so, I have not come across it; in my time things were not thus. But the picture is so striking, so well painted,

that you must have worked from nature. . . . Ah! the cowards, the fools, the wretched creatures! What a powerful severe satire! Your hand is strong to strike, your indignation eloquent. Martha—I know her, I have seen women like her; she is terribly, awfully true to life. And your hero's end is a nightmare. . . .

“Since your first writings you have made great progress, but this does not surprise me. I foretold what has occurred, and feel flattered at having been right. But your future holds still better things in store; you will simplify your methods, and put some order into your abundance of materials. I am aware that this is the new school; they wish to show all, tell all, and not leave a single blade of grass in shadow. . . . It is dazzling, sometimes too dazzling. You will in time discover that, as when composing a great picture, a certain amount must be thrown aside. . . . But this is nothing. Youth is such an excellent defect. . . .”

But for one such letter there were many disappointments; and on the very evening of the day that they received Madame Sand's warm-hearted words of praise and encouragement, Jules wrote in the diary:—

“Perhaps some day these lines, which we write in cold blood and without despair, will teach endurance to workers of another age. We would have them know that after ten years of work, the publication of fifteen volumes, after long vigils, persevering

conscientiousness, and even some success ; after giving to the world an historical work which has already a European reputation ; after this very novel, in which even our enemies recognise 'a stupendous strength,' neither the least important newspaper, nor any small review, has come to ask us what is going to happen to the MS. of our next novel ; this at a time when the most insignificant literary penny-a-liners, who pose as being learned, are edited, paid, and have their works published."

"*Saturday, March 17.*—I heard a humorous thing yesterday respecting the etiquette of German courts : it is forbidden to blow one's nose, or even to sneeze, in the presence of the Royalties of those parts of the world. An ambassadress of my family was accordingly much discomfited whenever she took cold. Fortunately she gained the affection of an antiquated *camerera major*, the successive members of whose family had for generations bequeathed to their descendants the secret of never sneezing in presence of their sovereign. And this secret she revealed to my cousin ; it consisted in pinching in a peculiar way the interior cartilage of the nose.

"*Thursday, April 12.*—We spent the evening at Brevannes with an old family friend, M. Colardez. He sits there, always the same, buried in his books—his memory, his intelligence, his powers of irony always keen and alert. We philosophised for a while with this great and charming mind, walking up and down the little straight paths of his garden



discussing the lethargy which has come over provincial life since the Revolution centralised all energies in the capital. To-day everything goes to Paris, the brain power as well as the fruit; and the town is fast becoming a colossal all-absorbing world, a polypus city, like Rome in the days of Aurelius.

"*April 17.*—If you go to the root of the farmers' grievance, you find one undisputed fact: men are becoming unfit for manual labour. Education is destroying the race of labourers, and thereby bringing about the ruin of agriculture. And whilst lamenting thus, our farmer Flammarion bids us observe that we are walking on our own fields! what a strange resemblance they bear to those of other people.

"*April 23.*—Life is decidedly a dull affair. Nothing unexpected ever happens. I spend my time receiving sale catalogues and suffering various forms of discomfort, including too familiar headaches. No mysterious individual leaves me a fortune. No one will think of offering me the freehold of the pretty house in the Rue Larochefoucauld, which I saw sold to-day; and when I glance over my past life it has always been the same kind of thing; surely I have the right to call Providence a cruel stepmother! In the course of my whole existence I have only had one piece of exceptional good luck. It was during my infancy. My nurse was holding me in her arms, and we passed a shop where hung a most beautiful expensive toy. A stranger who was passing at the time bought it and presented me with it!



*Walter & Pontall Ph. A.*

*Edmond de Goncourt  
et Jules de Goncourt.  
1860.*



January, that I thought there had come over pro-  
sperity this time, and I thought I could sell all  
my goods in the capital. To-day everything goes  
on well, the trees grow as well as the fruit; and  
the work is not so tedious, a calmed all-absorbing  
world is before me, like Rome in the days of  
Augustus.

1 April 1632. If you go to the root of the farmers'  
grievance, you will find one undisputed fact: men are  
neglecting their animal labour. Education is de-  
stroying the soul of labourers, and thereby bringing  
down the state of agriculture. And whilst lament-  
ing this, our Father Flammarton bids us observe  
the men working in our own fields! what a strange  
contrast they bear to those of other people.

1 April 1632. Life is decidedly a dull affair.  
Nothing unusual ever happens. I spend my time  
scurrying and scuffling and suffering various forms  
of discomfort, including two familiar headaches. No  
important individual leaves me a fortune. No one  
will think of offering me the freehold of the pretty  
house in the New Lanchester-ward, which I saw sold  
to-day, and when I glance over my past life it has  
glance back the same kind of thing; surely I have  
been right by self Providence a cruel stepmother! In  
the course of my whole existence I have only had  
one piece of unqualified good luck. It was during  
my college. My sister was holding me in her arms,  
and we passed a sleep when long a most beautiful  
experience. A woman who was passing at the  
time thought I had passed me with it!



“*Thursday, May 10.*—We asked Gavarni to-day whether he had ever really understood a woman. He answered, ‘Woman is quite impenetrable, not because she is deep, but because she is hollow!’ We asked him whether he had ever been in love. ‘No, the only people I have ever cared for are my father, my mother, and my child!’ . . .

“*May 25.*—Some people are born with a domestic temperament; they are absolutely fitted to be under the subjugation of the man who happens to be in power—they at once adopt the ideas in vogue . . . in short, they bow down to success. These form the majority, and a happy majority it is. But others, like ourselves, come into the world with a fierce spirit of rebellion against all that triumphs—our hearts glow with pity and love for all that are vanquished and crushed in the overwhelming victory of the Commonplace. . . .”

Bar-sur-Seine, one of the de Goncourts’ favourite summer retreats, and where they spent the June of 1860, is an old world town some twenty-five miles from Troyes, and situated on one of the most picturesque stretches of the upper Seine.

*To Paul de Saint-Victor.*

“BAR-SUR-SEINE, *June 12, 1860.*

“Your friends, my dear fellow, are staying in a place where the rain comes as a diversion. What more can I say? They lead the life of peaceful oysters, reading *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* in the

open fields, much astonishing the said fields; digesting good food; smoking pipes, which they allow to go out; chasing after thoughts which they fail to catch, thinking first of those who perchance remember them, then a little of Paris, and much of you. . . .

"I fain would see you here, but perhaps we should then less enjoy our resemblance to the animal creation. We should have to talk; you would, in spite of yourself, give us ideas; but still you would rest, you would be out at grass, and you would not be obliged each Sunday to roll your rock uphill. Our Bellevue promenades would be renewed in the woods, and under the shade of the willows by the side of the river. Unfortunately there is this great difference between God and the journalist—the latter cannot rest on the seventh day. You see I long for, and pity you.

"And your abominable whooping-cough? I hope it is well over, and that your throat is all right. What has become of you,—what are you doing? Are you sketching a great Bacchus for us; and have you dog-eared that fat volume of Dionysus which frightened me so at your rooms the other day?

"What are you doing with your life?—Do you each evening trot out Claudin in the Bois de Boulogne? . . . The world of letters is really a small provincial town; has anything new occurred therein? Have you read any books which strengthen, console, or delight? Is Vanity as obvious as ever,

and Prose as flat? And since we went away has any one picked up a new epithet or discovered a great man? Is there no new and immortal pamphlet? We are exiled, shut up in prison. Send us a few lines as an act of charity.

"And our journey: do you still think of it? I need not tell you again all the pleasure which we promise ourselves should it ever take place. Really we ought to see Dresden with you. I have reason to hope that you will have a red ribbon in your button-hole by August, but when we come back, a few weeks hence, I will tell you all about it.

"In regard to local news . . . we have a tax-collector who has a very pretty social talent, he whistles an accompaniment to the piano: it is very nice! And in the way of respectability we have the very type, a man who was born with gold spectacles. An optician had looked at his mother! His last joke, fresh as hot cakes, concerned a burnt letter. He said 'I offered it up to Vulcan!'

"Adieu. You see that we are living in a strange planet. Write to us, and ask what you will of your friends.

"JULES DE GONCOURT."

This letter alludes to a long-planned journey, finally made in September, when in the company of Saint-Victor the de Goncourts visited Berlin, Dresden, Saxony, Switzerland, and Nuremburg.

*To Flaubert.*

"BAR-SUR-SEINE, June 16, 1860.

"... So here we are. Do you not think that there comes a time of year when one would fain be a vegetable, and plant oneself in the ground in the hope of growing green once more? We are vegetating with much delight. We eat, we fence on the good earthen floor of a barn, and we almost live in a boat. So much for the physical creatures. As regards the moral being, do not think that for fifteen days we have thought of anything like an idea. It seems at times a heroic task to take up a pen. A family game of cards in the evening, and at intervals the reading of a page of Pascal, or Laclos' *Liaisons*, completes the picture of our life.

. "And now for you. What are you about? How are you getting on with the reconstruction of your imaginary and life-like Carthage, of which you are bound to give us the people, the manners, the passions, the religions, the women, the men, the people in the streets, and their shadows on the walls? Are you still climbing that mountainous middle chapter, or are you rather at that point of your work when the conception can be lovingly embraced, and the writer rolls down an easy slope?

"Why do you talk in your letter of working upon an empty abyss? The true emptiness, my dear friend, is perhaps history itself, because she is incarnate death. After many days spent in dis-



secting the past, one's imagination becomes chilled as in the atmosphere of a cellar. From the documents which one strips, rises an odour as of mummies embalmed in pearl powder. And so we hasten back to air, to daylight, to life, and to fiction; romance being, after all, the only true thing in life.—With all my heart,

“J. DE GONCOURT.”

“*June*.—The following is a curious instance of the education given during the First Empire by fathers of families to their children. The father of a connection of mine addressed his son in these terms: ‘You must know Latin; an acquaintance with this tongue will give the power of making yourself understood wherever you may happen to be. You must learn to play the violin, because if you are taken prisoner of war in some village, you will be able to make the peasants dance to the sound of your instrument, and this will bring you in a few pence; whereas, if you are in a town, you will be looked upon as a distinguished young man of good family, and this will procure you the *entrée* into good society, and will lead to your making useful friends. Again, you must be able to sleep as comfortably on a gun carriage as in your bed, and to accustom yourself to this, you are going to sleep for a week on a counterpane nailed to the floor!’

“A cousin of mine once observed to M. Colardez, ‘I have heard that you spoil your children terribly.’

“ ‘Madame, I once lost a child.’

“ ‘Was not this a heartfelt answer?

“ ‘Woe unto those productions of art, whose full beauty is only visible to artists.’ This sentence, one of the most foolish ever said, was uttered by d’Alembert. . . . The fascination of a work of art lies nearly always in ourselves, and depends upon the feeling with which we view it at a given moment. And who knows whether the impressions produced, as we think, by outside things, do not really come from ourselves and not from them? There are days when to our soul the sun seems grey, and sometimes grey skies call up to mind scenes full of brightness. What gives the full value to wine in the glass!—the moment, the place, and the table, at which we drink. What constitutes the real beauty of a woman is the love with which we gaze at her.”

On the 6th of September, the de Goncourts started with Paul de Saint-Victor for their long-planned tour in Germany.

“ ‘I have seen Heidelberg,” wrote Jules in the diary. “It seemed to me I was looking at Victor Hugo’s work, when posterity will have passed over it . . . when the words will have become rusty, when the magnificent walls of his literary edifice will attain the solemnity of a ruin, when Time, like a centenarian creeper, will climb over and mingle with the beauty of his verse. Though they be old and broken, the pillars will retain the majesty

of those old Sarmatian kings struck down under a shower of missiles. And the Master's vast palace of poetry will remain great and lovely, as does this giant of architectural grace, recalling Albert Dürer mingled with Michael Angelo, Raphael with Palladio, Gargantua represented by the famous Tun, and finding place for the Invicta Venus within its chapel.

“*Berlin, Friday 7.*—I found myself enveloped by the red tobacco-laden atmosphere of a small café. Towards my table advanced the trembling figure of one forgotten by time, barely alive, his forehead swept by long wisps of white hair. The poor little old man, wrapt in a cloak not unlike a winding sheet, wore an order in his button-hole, and he bent his head forward, giving me a long fixed stare with silent terrible eyes, which might have been those of a soldier stricken to death. Big white moustaches hid his mouth, and his chin trembled below the toothless jaws. He had hardly the strength to carry the small box of perfumery containing the eau-de-Cologne and pomatum which he hoped to sell me. He kept laying them before me, and his eyes opened wider and wider; Blucher's old soldier, in a voice which seems to come from some cavernous depth, muttered in French, ‘*Entré à Paris!*’

“At night this city seems full of Hoffmann.”

“*Dresden, September 10.*—The two Watteaus in the Dresden Museum (661, 662) are very interest-

ing; they are much less Venetian in tone than the other works of the Master, . . . and from these Pate has borrowed all the clear warm colouring of his palette, the white, yellow, and scarlet tones; I used to think his colouring original. . . ."

Nuremburg struck the travellers as a silent, peaceful town, whose citizens must lead antediluvian existences; and all they have to say about Vienna is an enthusiastic description of a number of Chardins found by them in the Lichters Museum.

The end of September saw Edmond and Jules once more installed in their Paris home, but the younger brother notes, somewhat sadly, that after Vienna, "that city of noise and motion," Paris struck him as grey and dull.

"The vanity of the dramatic author reminds one of that Corinthian madman, who was convinced that the sun was made for the sole purpose of giving him light."

"*September 8.*—'Do you know why Sebastopol fell? You think it was taken by Pélissier?' We were asked this question by some one who seemed fairly well informed. 'Well,' he continued, 'the true history of things is never told. Pélissier had nothing to do with it! Sebastopol was taken by the Minister of Foreign Affairs!'

"It seems that there was at St. Petersburg during the war, a German military attaché, M. de Munster, much liked in Russia. He kept King William informed of all the secret details of the campaign,

including the official reports of all the councils of war held by the Empress. The King of Prussia never communicated the contents of M. de Munster's despatches to any one, not even to the head of his Cabinet, M. de Manteuffel, but he did confide them to his intimate mentor, M. de Gerlach, a mystical Teuton and feudal Tory *à la* de Maistre, who was full of scorn for those who had enforced their claims to natural rights, and who was quite shocked by Queen Victoria's visit to Paris.

"M. de Manteuffel came to know of this secret correspondence. He had the letters intercepted, and copied, while they were being carried from the palace to M. de Gerlach's house. The letters contained all possible information respecting the defences of Sebastopol; for instance, on one occasion the following passage occurred:—'If Sebastopol had been attacked on such and such a day, from such and such a point, the fortress would have been taken.' And again, 'There is only one point which can be attacked (and the point was indicated); if this should come to pass all is lost, but so long as the French have not found it, there is nothing to fear.'

"The French Government bribed the thief who intercepted the correspondence for the Minister's benefit, and Napoleon III. was given the passage in the letters revealing the secret. He at once despatched orders to Pélissier to attempt the storming of the fortress from the point indicated, but without informing him on what ground he based his

certainty of success. Pélissier, bearing in mind the failure of the attempt to storm Sebastopol on the 18th of July, refused to comply with the Emperor's orders. One telegram followed another; Pélissier got impatient, and had the telegraph wire cut. The Emperor was on the point of starting himself, but finally sent General Vaillant, and thanks to the indications furnished by M. de Munster, Malakoff was attacked just in the weak place. . . . These letters cost only 60,000 francs—a mere song. Now go and see the panorama of the storming of the Malakoff as described by the newspapers. . . .”

## CHAPTER X

Jules compares the Paris of the Past with the Paris of the Present—  
Studies at the Hospital of La Charité—Henri Mürger's death and  
funeral—The publication of *Sœur Philomène*—Flaubert's reading  
of *Salammbô*—Letters.

“ *November 18.*—My Paris, the Paris in which I was born, the Paris of 1830 to 1848, is fast disappearing, not only from the material point of view, but also from the moral. A great evolution in social life is beginning to make itself felt. I see women, children, families, and whole households frequent the cafés : this will lead to the extinction of home life. The club for the upper classes, the café for the lower ; it is to this society is evidently tending. Hence the impression of unrest which makes one feel as if one were only a passer-by. I am apart from all that is going on about me, nor do I feel at home in these long new straight boulevards, which, turning neither to the right nor to the left, offer no interesting perspective. They do not recall the world of Balzac, but rather evoke some future American Babylon. No one should come into the world at a moment of transition ; the soul is as ill at ease as would be the body lodged in a newly-built house. . . . Perhaps there is no true liberty for the individual when once he is member of a civilised society, in which he loses

possession of himself, his family, and his property. Since 1789 the State has indeed become an absorbing quantity. It has claimed most extensively the right of each for the profit of all, . . . and I am wondering whether the future is holding in reserve, under the disguise of an absolute state government, aided by the despotism of French red-tapism, a tyranny much stronger than that of a Louis XIV.

“*November 29.*—Apropos of a sketch of Madame Hereule, the model celebrated for her wild extravagances, Gavarni returned to his youth and told us of the nocturnal adventures he once loved, of the nights spent in the company of Mdlle. Aimée and of a whole band of young respectable married women in the Bois de Boulogne, in the Faubourg de Roule, and in the country; of the pleasure parties, of which the chief attractions were Mdlle. Aimée’s merry laughter and Chandellier’s practical jokes. It is astonishing and strange to think how little it took to amuse the generation of 1830, and Gavarni’s set formed no exception. There was almost a childish sense of youthfulness about these young men, they required very little of the fillip and stimulating charm of modern life, and seem to have spent the greater part of their life with *bourgeoises* who were no longer young, or with married women for whom they cherished a secret and platonic affection.”

He described a day spent with Madame Waldor, who had invited Chandellier, Mdlle. Aimée, and himself to visit her in her country-house at Saint Ouen. The country-house turned out to be two rooms



hired in a washerwoman's cottage, which afforded no more extensive view of green fields and pastures new than the walls of the courtyard, and the linen laid out to dry. They lunched, they dined, and so thoroughly enjoyed this singular peep at country life, that they sat up all night talking, the two men seated on chairs, the two women lying on the bed. Their sole refreshments consisted of a bowl of punch, which was made to go further by the addition of water—which Chandellier was obliged to fetch from the Seine. . . .

“The greatest strength of the Christian religion lies in the fact that it offers consolation for the sadness of life, its misfortunes, its cares, its sickness: it appeals to those who suffer. It promises comfort to those who need it, and hope to those who despair. The older religions dealt with the joys of man and the festivities of life. Since then the world has grown old and sad. . . .”

Haunted with the desire of intense realism, they had no sooner made up their minds to write *Sœur Philomène* than they decided to make this novel contain a true description of hospital life in all its phases, taken, as they themselves expressed it, “*sur le vrai, sur le vif, sur le saignant.*” With this object in view they obtained an introduction to one of the doctors at the Charité Hospital, and for days and weeks they lived in an atmosphere of grief and suffering strangely painful to men of their vivid imaginations.

"*December 23.*—We spent part of the night at the hospital. We approached the bedside of a consumptive patient who had just passed away. I looked down and saw the face of a man of forty; the upper part of the body was propped up by pillows, a brown jersey ill-buttoned was fastened over the chest, two arms stretched out of bed, and the head was turned slightly on one side and thrown back. You could distinguish the sinews below the neck; he had a full-grown black beard, a pinched nose, and hollow eyes; his hair was all spread out on the pillow round his face, just like a heap of damp flax; his mouth was wide open, like that of a man whose life had passed away whilst he was trying to breathe but could not find air. . . . The dead man called up another image in my memory—Goya's garrotted criminal.

"Then I saw in the dim shadow far away, behind a glass panel, a tiny gleam which grew larger and brighter until it became a light; something white walked with it, something upon which the light shone. This mysterious something opened the glass panel, and two women came into the ward, one holding a candle in her hand. It was the Sister going her rounds, accompanied by a servant of the community! The Sister, doubtless a novice, for she wore no black veil, was dressed in some soft white material with a band round her forehead; the servant wore a nightcap, a black neckerchief, and short skirt.

"They went up to a bed, the Sister to the head,

the servant, holding high the candle, to the foot. Then I heard a voice so gentle and soft that I thought it was the invalid's: no, it was the Sister who was speaking to an old woman in a caressing but firm tone, in the way one speaks to children who do not wish to take something one must give them. . . .

"In truth, this inspires one with admiration; it shows simple grandeur which makes the noisy demagogue seem very small when he rants of his love for his fellow-men. . . . Alas, the religion of the future will not easily produce such devotion.

"And whilst watching this young girl, bending tenderly over the horrible dirty old shrew who abused her, I remembered Béranger, who deemed it witty to make a Sister of Charity and an opera-dancer enter Paradise on equal terms! . . .

"*December 26.*—We have been again to the Charité. . . .

"We went down with one of the house-surgeons to see the out-patients in the consulting room. A little old man approached slowly, the collar of his shabby coat turned up to his chin, and a shapeless hat held in his shaking hands; he had long scanty white hair and hollow eyes, and he trembled, poor old man, like a dead leaf blown by the winter wind. He held out a knotty hand on which was a large growth.

"'Do you cough?' asked the house-surgeon.

"'Yes, Monsieur, a great deal,' he answered, in

a faint, dolorous, and humble voice, 'but it is my wrist that gives me such pain.'

"'We cannot take you in, you must go to the Parvis Notre-Dame.'

"The old man said nothing, but looked vaguely at the house-surgeon.

"'And you must ask for the doctor, not for the surgeon,' he continued, seeing the old man remained quite motionless.

"'But the pain is here,' the old man insisted gently, pointing to his wrist.

"'They will cure that by curing your cough.'

"'Come, you must go off to the Parvis Notre Dame,' cried the porter in a rough voice, in which nevertheless was a touch of pity.

"We could see the snow falling in heavy flakes. The old man went away without a word, hat in hand. 'Poor wretch,' murmured the porter, 'what weather! and it's such a way off! He won't last more than five days.'—'Ah, but if I had taken him in to-day, Velpeau would have sent him away to-morrow,' observed the surgeon. 'He's regularly run down, as we say here. Yes, there are bad moments to be faced, but if we were to take in all the consumptive people who come to our door . . . we should have no room for the others . . . for Paris wears out her children.'

"This scene moved us more than anything we had yet observed in the hospital. . . .

"*December 27.*—How horrible is this odour of

the hospital which seems to haunt us. I do not know whether it is real or simply an effect of the imagination, but we feel as if we must always be washing our hands, and the odour that arises from the water seems to us like the stale nauseous smell of cerate. We really must tear ourselves away from the hospital, and try to efface by some violent distraction the impression it has left. . . .

"*January 1861.*—A book is nothing unless written either by an artist or by a thinker.

"Instruction is the great peril of modern society. Every peasant mother wishes, even by straining every nerve, to give her children the education she never received herself, and to have them taught reading and writing, sciences unknown to her. This wild folly, this mania, which is spreading in the lowest stratum of society, of wishing to raise one's children above one's own level (just as you put the little ones on your shoulders when you want them to see fireworks), this craze, I maintain, is creating a France of ignoble clerks, secretaries, and men of letters—a France, where the workmen no longer produce workers, the labourer no longer produces labourers; soon there will be no arms left capable of doing the manual work of the country. . . .

"*January 18.*—Mürger is dying of an illness in suffering from which one falls literally into pieces whilst yet alive; they were clipping his moustache the other day and the lip came off with the ~~the~~ The last time I saw him was at the Café R' month ago; he looked well and hearty and in .

spirits, for he had just had a successful one-act play acted at the Palais-Royal. . . .

"Apropos of this comedy, the papers had talked of him more than they had seen fit to do apropos of all his novels, and he told us that it was too silly to waste one's time writing books which brought one neither fame nor money—and that in future he was going to give himself up to dramatic work!

"One cannot help considering this deathbed as an awful judgment on Bohemia. . . ."

On the 28th of January Henri Mürger, the joyous historian of French literary Bohemia, died, after having written within a few days of his death the touching lines:—

#### BALLADE DU DÉSESPÉRÉ.

"Entre sous mon toit, bois, et mange,  
Dors, et quand tu t'éveilleras,  
Pour payer ton écot, cher ange  
Dans tes bras tu m'emporteras."

He was given a public funeral, the State paying all expenses.

". . . We were at least fifteen hundred in the courtyard of the Dubois Hospital. . . . Looking at the crowd I began to reflect what a curious thing is the justice meted out by immediate posterity with regard to a writer who has just died. Only six or seven persons followed Heine to the grave:

Musset's mourners did not number more than forty. The coffin of a man of letters has the same kind of good or evil fortune as that which befalls literary work.

"There was no real grief in the heart of this crowd. I never attended a funeral where there was so little said about the dead man. Théophile Gautier commented on the discovery he has made about the oily taste in beefsteaks, which he declared to be due to the fact that of late they have taken to fattening cattle with rape-cakes. . . .

"*February*.—No one writes the books they intended to write; for it is impossible to foresee what may inspire one with a motive. There is some unknown power . . . some superior will, in fact a kind of necessity, which orders the work and guides your pen, so much so that that which comes from one's hand often appears not to be your own. Your book astonishes you as much as something that was latent in you of which you were not conscious. That is the impression which *Sœur Philomène* produces upon me.

"The horror that men feel for reality has made them have recourse to the following three safety-valves: drunkenness, love, work.

"*Sunday, March 17*.—Flaubert was talking to us to-day. 'The story or the plot of a novel is quite indifferent to me. When writing a novel my aim is to represent a colour or a shade. For instance, the tone of my Carthaginian novel is *purple*. In *Madame Bovary* I was anxious to produce a musty

shade, suggestive of the life of vermin. The moral of the whole thing affected me so little that a few days before beginning to write the book I had a conception of *Madame Bovary* which was quite different from the one eventually given to the world. Though the tone of the picture and the surroundings would have been the same, I had thought of her as a pious, chaste old maid. . . . I realised, however, that that would make an impossible heroine.' . . ."

The manuscript of *Sœur Philomène* was sent by the authors to M. Michel Lévy, the founder of the famous publishing house of that name; he, however, soon sent the MS. back with a letter of regret, giving among other reasons for his adverse decision, the painful nature of the subject, and the poignancy of treatment. "Decidedly," wrote Jules, "both publishers and public wish to render our path as thorny and bitter as possible. After ten years of labour, of struggle, of battle, of many attacks and of little praise, we shall probably find ourselves obliged to pay for the publication of this volume."

Finally, to their surprise and considerable gratification, they sold the manuscript of their story to the Librairie Nouvelle, making, they considered, the excellent terms for themselves of twopence (twenty centimes) on each copy sold.

"*Sunday, March 31.*—We lunched at Flaubert's house, and met Sari and Lagier; the conversation turned on the theatre. It is only during this



century that actors have striven to produce silhouette effects: thus Paul Menier, taking a hint from Gavarni's drawings, shows the public his back as often as his face, and Rouvière reproduces on the stage the twisted poses, and epileptic movements of the hands shown in Delacroix's lithographs of *Faust*.

"Sari talked curiously of his ballet-dancers at twenty sous (the evening), of his chorus-girls at thirty sous, and of that incurable craze for the stage which forces those who have once tasted of theatrical life to return to the boards. . . . 'There are work-people,' he added, 'many of them most intelligent in their way, who exchange ten francs a day for a sum just sufficient to keep body and soul together, . . . carried off their feet, led away by the exciting conditions of theatrical life, the comradeship between the sexes, the gossip of the green room, the feverish interest in the success or the failure of a piece, and by the thrill caused by the applause of the public.' . . .

"After a visit to the municipal archives, an involuntary feeling of awe came upon us when we entered these rooms filled with the registers bound in white vellum. The words printed on the backs of these volumes had something solemn about them: *Births, Deaths, Marriages, Abjurations*. The eye was caught in passing by the name of some old parish, Saint-Séverin, or Saint-Jean-en-Grève, which suggested a host of memories. Here lay cradled the Past of Paris; and on a sheet of paper, the sole memorandum of many who have passed away,—

'*Born, Married, Dead.*'—How many shadows there be who can boast only of this short biography! In what clouds of oblivion would be shrouded the past of these millions of men, but for the signing of their name, and the record of their existence contained in these registers.

"A broken-down old fellow, whose complexion matched in hue the musty old volumes round him, came and went among these catacombs like the genius of the place, ferreting out the documents, scenting out as by a divining rod long past births and deaths: he looked like a figure of old Time in some ancient picture; a cat followed him, a cat as white as are all animals who frequent the region of Death, as are the white mice who haunt graveyards. . . .

"*Sunday, April 18.*—Flaubert was telling us to-day, that before going to Lévy he had offered *Madame Bovary* to Jacottet. 'Your book is very good,' observed the publisher; 'you possess a chiselled style, but you cannot aspire to Amédée Acharl's success, can you? Well, I am publishing two volumes of his this year, and so I could not promise to bring out your novel for some time.'

"*Monday, May 6.*—We went at four o'clock to see Flaubert, who had invited us, together with the painter Gleyre, to assist at a great reading of *Salammbô*. From four to seven Flaubert read in a loud and sonorous voice, which has about as soothing an effect upon you as the clanging of bronze. Dinner was at seven, after which an interval

was allowed for one pipe, and then the reading started afresh. He analysed certain unfinished portions as he went along; we listened till the last chapter was reached—that was, till two o'clock in the morning.

"I am going to write my sincere opinion about the work of a man I love, and whose first book, *Madame Bovary*, I admired without reserve. *Salammbo* does not come up to what I expected of Flaubert. The personality of the author, so well concealed in *Madame Bovary*, is here only too clearly marked, and asserts itself in bombastic and melodramatic fashion: the colouring is too heavy, and the style too florid. The effort is stupendous, the patience infinite; and though I criticise the work, I most fully appreciate the remarkable talent displayed by the author; but I fail to find in the book any of those flashes which reveal, as it were for a moment, the soul of a nation which has passed away. As regards the historical moral re-constitution of a past epoch, our good Flaubert deceives himself; the words he puts in the mouths of his characters merely express the ordinary generous sentiments of humanity, and not anything peculiar to the Carthaginian populace, and his Mathor is only, when all is said and done, the operatic tenor of a barbaric libretto. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that, so far as the workmanship is concerned,—and thanks to the labour expended, and the local colouring brought in,—the reader will be transported for the nonce into a world of Flaubert's creation; but the picture conjured up before you is

blurred, because while the perspective is not sufficiently graduated, the tints are too uniformly bright, and the length of description weakens the effectiveness of the impression. . . .

" *June 19.*—In Grossetête's restaurant we caught a glimpse of Ponson du Terrail, with his dogcart waiting on the boulevard; it is the only carriage owned by a Parisian man of letters. Alas! the poor fellow pays somewhat dearly for the privilege, by the sweat of his brow, and by the sacrifice of all his literary pride. He is known to have said to the editor of a paper in which he was publishing a long serial novel, 'Give me notice a few days ahead if your public is getting bored, and I will finish up in one chapter!' Why, a fruit-seller disposes of his wares in a more dignified fashion. . . .

" *Bar-sur-Seine, June 13.* I woke up this morning in a room full of the portraits of my ancestors and ancestresses, clothed in the dress of their time and social position: here was the man of medicine, with a Boerhaave in his hand, the priest with a mass-book, the banker holding a note of exchange. There was also the faded pastel of a soldier, of a little girl with a yellow canary perched on her arm; of an old woman of dark, austere countenance, the inconsolable Jansenist mother of the young soldier, who was killed in a duel at the age of twenty. There is a flavour about these portraits of a world long passed away, where each felt pride in his special profession or place. Now-a-days a lawyer has his portrait taken in hunting dress. . . .

“*July 11.*—After having carried about parcels of *Sœur Philomène* all day, I dined this evening with Charles Edmond, who has just returned from Brussels, where he has been spending a few days with Victor Hugo. The poet, who on the day of his arrival had just written the word ‘finis’ on *Les Misérables*, said to him, ‘Dante tried to make a hell with poetry, I have tried to make one with reality!’ Hugo bears exile with rare philosophy, and denies that one’s native land consists only of a certain portion of the world’s territory. ‘One’s country,’ he repeated, ‘what is that? An idea—perhaps it means Paris! I have never felt the need of it. My native heath is the Rue de Rivoli, and I detest the Rue de Rivoli.’”

The critics gave but a poor reception to *Sœur Philomène*, Paul de Saint-Victor being the only writer of importance who reviewed the book at any length. His notice, published in *La Presse*, delighted the brothers, as did a kindly letter written to them about this time by their friend:—

“MY DEAR FRIENDS,—I am writing in a pause between two articles. . . . I am glad that the review pleased you, and I beg of you to believe that my praise was sincere. Your book both charmed and saddened me. For three days my imagination went into mourning. *Cécile* is exquisite. I can see her before me with ‘her long face.’ Where the devil did you find all those little details of youthful piety?

I think your descriptions might truly be styled psychological studies. I have been through it all myself; the Jesuit College at Fribourg, where I was educated, was absolutely the male twin to your convent. Reading your book I felt my old fervour revive, '*Veteris agnosco restigia flammæ.*' I was truly moved, much as might be an old serpent to whom was shown his young skin.

"I have good news to give you of your book. I hear it praised on all sides, and Bourdillac tells me that it is going well."

Jules de Goncourt sent Gustave Flaubert one of the first copies of the volume, with the following letter:

"BAR-SUR-SEINE, July 10, 1861.

"MY DEAR FRIEND, You will have received at last our novel in volume form.

"When you have read it we shall be very glad to be informed of your judgment and general feeling; we are the more anxious to learn this, because we do not ourselves realise what we have produced. This story is the most impersonal piece of work we have yet done. . . . I give you my word that we do not know whether the book is good or bad. There are times when we fancy the story ought to have been called *A Human Angel*, and instead of a medical student we should have made our hero a Zouave. A Sister of Charity and a Soldier! that would have made a popular, a national romance.

" . . . Now we want to ask you something—most competent of critics,—Is our hospital thrown in sufficient or in too little relief? . . . We have sought unity, the concentration of all the interest on the couple, above all, on the nun.

"As regards the latter, the chief difficulty was not to make her too saintly. We tried to make her a living woman, and so created her in a poor humble position.

"I do not tell you of all the sacrifices, the amputations, the softenings down, to which we resigned ourselves, through cowardly respect for the laws of our country. . . .

"I do not excuse myself to you, my dear Flaubert, for daring thus to talk of nothing but ourselves. But I shall feel hurt if you in your answer do not tell us plenty about yourself. How about Carthage and *Salamambo*? How many pages have you still to write? Ah! my friend, what a pleasure it will be to meet you once more!"

To this letter Flaubert made answer:—"Your volume, received this morning at eleven, was read through by five. I began by feeling rather cross with you both during the first few pages, on account of constant tautology—for instance, that of the word 'bed;' but later I caught fire, and read straight on without stopping to take breath, whilst now and again my eyes filled with tears, just as if I had been a common philistine.

"I think that you have made a decided advance

on *Les Gens de Lettres*, both as regards narrative, deductions drawn from facts, and the general plan. . . .

"I have but one reproach to make ; your book ends too soon ; on reaching the last page one cannot but exclaim ' Already ! ' "

A few days later Flaubert, writing again to Jules de Goncourt on the same subject, declares - " No, the book is not overburdened with horrors ; I myself could bear a few more ; but that is a question of temperament. You found the right limit. There are some exquisite passages, those describing the old man coughing, the surgeon in the midst of his pupils, &c. The end, Barrière's death, is splendid."

*Sœur Philomène* laid for the brothers de Goncourt the foundation of their fame as realistic novelists. It is the story of a young girl brought up by charity in a Religious House, and led by one of her school companions into a sphere of religious fervour alien to her own nature. Céline's persuasions and prayers so far work upon Philomène that, when the former departs to enter as a novice into another Order, the latter remains with a distracted ideal of life. She goes to live with an aunt who is house-keeper to a gentleman ; and there encounters various experiences which wound her in the most sensitive recesses of her soul ; finally she makes up her mind to embrace the religious life, and becomes a nun of the Order of St. Augustine, and nursing Sister



in a provincial hospital. She here meets with a young house surgeon, named Barrière. Between them springs up a profound friendship. He dies of blood-poisoning, and the book ends with a famous scene, in which Sœur Philomène kneels by his dead body, and silently carries off a lock of hair which a fellow student had cut off for Barrière's mother.

Unfortunately for *Sœur Philomène* and her luckless authors, the Librairie Nouvelle fell into bankruptcy within a few weeks of the publication of the novel. The whole edition was sold at cost price to various booksellers, and the book only obtained due recognition when it was re-published fifteen years later by Messrs. Charpentier. But in the de Goncourts' own circle *Sœur Philomène* met with the warmest welcome and appreciation.

"July 15, 1861.

"What a reader, what a friend you are, my dear Flaubert. Thanks, thanks, and renewed thanks for your compliments, and above all, for your criticism. . . .

"I am longing, my dear Flaubert, to hear you talk and to listen to your laugh. It is a pity that you cannot send me by post the clear sound of your voice and the childlike ring of your merriment."

*To Paul de Saint-Victor, written the same day:—*

"Once more thank you, dear friend. The last few days we longed for happiness, and you have given

us a portion of joy. We were anxious, discouraged about our work, living through those evil grey hours of doubt when one struggles with one's literary conscience, and a sense of disillusionment makes one almost regret having published a book at all.

"Edmond had felt sure that Céline would please you ; and therefore he triumphed over me this morning, whilst we were reading your letter in the garden, close to a kitten which employed its little mind in trying to catch a butterfly."

## CHAPTER XI

An autumn holiday—The de Goncourts' first impressions of Sainte-Beuve—Year 1862—An evening with Théophile Gautier and his daughter—A visit to George Sand.

IN September the brothers joined Saint-Victor in a tour through Germany and Holland. In each town the travellers paid their first visit to the museum; and long critical notes on the methods and works of Rembrandt, Van der Meer, and Peter de Hooghe fill up pages of the diary. Paul de Saint-Victor seems to have been a pleasant travelling companion. "He is so charmingly simple, like a schoolboy in holiday time. At times he enthrals us by the loftiness of his thought, at others he carries us away by the delightful grace of his sallies, and our laughter is excited by his absurd imitations of M. Prudhomme and of Grassot. All these qualities constitute him an ideal travelling companion for us, who have been somewhat spoilt by our dull home life. He is the only fellow-traveller we could have borne during a month's travel: and this is no small praise. . . ."

"*September* 18.—There is decidedly no worse trade than this fine art of letters. The Librairie

Nouvelle is in bankruptcy. Our *Hommes de Lettres* cost us about five hundred pounds; *Sœur Philomène* will bring us in nothing: still it is an advance. . . .”

“Shall I tell you the secret of all societies and of all associations?” said Gavarni. “Individuals are like units, of such slight value, that they are always on the look-out for a naught, which, placed on their right hand, will bestow on them the relative value of a ten! . . .”

“It seems to me, and surely I am right, when I say that love consists in seeing a woman and saying at once, ‘She is the one woman for me: I shall never find another. There is not another like her. She is the flesh and blood realisation of my dreams.’ Alas! it is often with this woman as it is with a house one covets ardently,—she is already let.”

Sainte-Beuve, the critic and historian who had been one of the first to acknowledge the value of the de Goncourts’ studies on the Eighteenth Century, wrote to the brothers in the October of 1861, with the view of making their personal acquaintance, and during the eight years which followed there are constant references to him in the Diary. Here are the de Goncourts’ first impressions of the man with whom they later became so intimate:—

“October 18.—Sainte-Beuve . . . arrived at two o’clock; he is a little, round, fat man, with a ruddy complexion, dressed in rustic fashion—in a word,

a silhouette à la Béranger. His forehead is lofty, the top of his head is bald and shining, he has goggle eyes, an inquisitive nose, a large ugly mouth hidden by a kindly smile, and prominent cheek-bones as round as magnifying glasses. His white forehead, pink colouring, and the childlike expression of the lower part of the face, suggests some provincial librarian, who, living under the shadow of a literary cloister, still enjoys the excellent Burgundy which is to be found in the cloister cellars. . . . His conversation is full of little delicate touches, but he never uses a full brush; and his talk reminds one of a lady water-colourist's palette covered with delicate suggestive tints.

"We spoke to him of his study on Louis Philippe; he replied, 'I only saw the king once, on the occasion when he received Hugo, Villemain, and myself as Academicians. Louis Philippe pressed Hugo's hands effusively, and thanked him warmly for having in his speech recalled Napoleon's judgment of the citizen king.'

"He mentioned *Sœur Philomène*, maintaining that literary work of any value must be based upon the study of Nature. He said that he had very little taste for work drawn simply from the imagination. For this reason he takes but slight pleasure in the perusal of Hamilton's graceful stories.\* Besides, he seriously doubts, whether the ancients really set so much store by that 'ideal,'

\* *Mémoires de Gramont.*

which is now so much in vogue ; . . . he maintains rather that their works tended most distinctly towards realism, only that their reality was finer than ours. . . .

"An Englishman, who had settled in France after the Restoration, and who lived out at Belleville, was well known as the most hospitable of men. One day, Salvandy, who had received from him an invitation to dinner, found at the Englishman's door a gentleman evidently there for the same purpose as himself. Neither of them had read the address heading the letter of invitation, and so were unaware that their common friend had moved to Passy four months previously. The two guests accordingly decided to have their dinner together, though they were total strangers to one another. Salvandy soon became somewhat puzzled by his companion, in whom he perceived want of breeding, and yet a certain distinction. In the middle of dinner the stranger exclaimed suddenly, 'Now I will sing you a little song to keep myself in working order!' It was Béranger.

"When we intimated that we thought the poet's glory somewhat overrated, Sainte-Beuve replied, 'Yes, people went somewhat far in their praise. There is a man at Batignolles who sends me every fortnight verses in honour of the singer of Lisette . . . it has become quite a mania with him. . . . There are runs of luck and ill-luck like this in France. . . . Béranger's great strength lies in his descriptions of the life of the people, but he illuminates and

idealises it all by the little delicate side-lights he throws upon everything he described. He hides an excessive delicacy under a somewhat coarse exterior. Lamartine said he had large hands: this was false – he had the hands of a woman!’

“At this point the conversation turned suddenly on Flaubert, and Sainte-Beuve exclaimed: ‘One should not take too long over a book, or one gets behind the times. . . . With works like those of Virgil this does not matter. But after *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert ought to have given us studies from life, works in which the subjectivity of the author was brought into prominence, whereas he has only given us Chateaubriand’s *Martyrs* over again.’

“Then Sainte-Beuve enlarged upon the ennui of having to skip from subject to subject, from one century to another.

“‘I have work before me for three years,’ he said suddenly, ‘unless some accident take place. Well, at the end of three years I shall have made about as much as one unsuccessful play would have brought in:’ then, after a moment’s silence, ‘Ah me! the stage! Comedy in verse is a thing of the past; either you write verses unworthy of the name, or you write prose. Everything is gradually being merged into the novel. There is such a vast scope, and the form lends itself to everything. The fiction of to-day is full of talent.’

“He left us, extending a cold, fat hand, and on the doorstep stopped to say, ‘Come and see me early

in the week, after that I am obliged to keep my head in a bag.' . . .

"France feels such a longing for military glory that the peaceful king (Louis Philippe) was obliged to give her this glory at Versailles—in effigy. . . .

"History is true romance, fiction is history which might have been true. . . ."

*To Flaubert.*

"December 1861.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—How are you and *Salammbô*? I have had but little news of either of you. In Paris you are become a legendary figure. . . . There is nothing fresh to tell you of this little provincial town called Paris. The *Figaro* still sticks pins into people's calves. . . . There is some talk of putting up a Latin inscription on Mürger's tombstone. If this ever comes to anything, I cannot help wondering how his ghost will ever find its resting-place after an evening spent at the *Brasserie des Martyrs*. . . .

"As for us, my dear friend, we are absorbed in a long important historical work. By the way, I have a favour to ask of you. Would you ask some one to copy at the Rouen town library two of Madame de la Popelinière's love letters to Richelieu? There is one in which she says, 'I would have my arm cut off in order to have you near me.' A somewhat rare heart-cry in that stilted Eighteenth Century."

The historical work alluded to in the above letter was *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*.



*To the same, a few days later :—*

“ Ah ! what a man, what a friend you are. On opening your parcel I felt ashamed of myself. I had no idea that those letters were so long, but as you declare that copying those ‘ashes of a long gone love’ did not give you much trouble, I will not be too grateful. . . . According to the latest rumours, *Les Misérables* will certainly be published next February, on the anniversary of the publication of *Notre Dame de Paris*. . . . I believe that *Les Misérables* will be brought out in two successive volumes, but I do not know what time is to elapse between each series. You ask me my advice about *Salamambo* ; I do not consider that it would be impudent, but imprudent, to bring out your book at the same time ; Hugo has so great a hold on the critics and public. If you will have the patience to wait till next November the excitement will have calmed down, and your success will not follow that of any one. That is what we advise. We know it will be hard, but, on the other hand, you are so patient.

“ To-morrow I will go to the *Bibliothèque*, and soon you will receive a perfect list of the various agonies gone through by those who die of hunger—a very unpleasant form of death, I fancy, unless one has always been more or less starved from infancy. Every day when dinner time approaches, I suffer pangs of hunger, so I know what it must be like.”

Flaubert had asked Jules de Goncourt to seek out, in a medical library, a work published by a German who deliberately allowed himself to die of hunger, in order that he might put on record his sensations. Flaubert wished to use the information when describing the death of the Mercenaries in *Salambo*.

"*January 1, 1862.* To us New Year's day is the day of the dead. Our hearts are chilled, and we yearn for those who have passed away.

"We climbed up to a little room on the fifth story, in order to pay a call on our old cousin Cornelia. She was obliged to send us away, on account of the influx of visitors: ladies, schoolboys, young and old men, either relations or connections. She was unable to offer them all seats, and she had not sufficient room to wish to detain them any length of time. One of the finest peculiarities belonging to those of noble birth is that they do not shun poverty. In *bourgeois* families they do not acknowledge relations below a certain monetary position, or those who live higher than the fourth story.

"*February 15.*—I found myself to-day on the Quai Voltaire, in the shop of France, the bookseller. A man came in, bargained some time for a book, went out, came back, and started bargaining afresh. He was a fat, squarely built man, who strutted about like a horse-dealer. He gave Rambouillet as the address to which his book was to be sent. M—— at Rambouillet.

“‘Ah!’ said the bookseller, whilst writing down the address, ‘I was there in 1830 with Charles the Tenth.’

“‘And I,’ declared the fat man, ‘I was there also. I had the king’s last signature. Twenty minutes before the deputation from the Provisional Government arrived, I was there with my gig. Ah! he was very hard-up—he was selling his plate and at a low price. I got twenty-five thousand francs’ worth for twenty-three thousand. If I had arrived sooner . . . he sold two hundred thousand worth; but then, you see, I had fifteen thousand mouths to feed—his Guard, for I was head of the Commissariat.’

“‘Ah, well!’ cried the bookseller, ‘you fed us very badly. I remember an old cow which we killed during the campaign.’

“Chance had thrown these two together, the old soldier of Charles the Tenth’s guard, and the quondam head of the Commissariat who had gleaned from royalty in misfortune, and bought the plate of a king in the last strait. The soldier has become a needy bookseller, the head of the Commissariat has blossomed out into a fat merchant reeking of ease and prosperity. I looked to see the title of the book he had chosen; it was a History of the crimes of the Popes. . . .

“Strange indeed are popular idolatries! Do you know how many altars were erected in honour of Marat? Forty-four thousand!

“*February 21.*—We dine with Flaubert at the

Charles-Edmond. The conversation turned on his love affair with Madame Colet. On one occasion she pursued him to the maternal roof, and asked for an explanation in his mother's presence, that mother who has always considered that his harshness towards his mistress was an insult to her sex. 'This is the only cloud that ever came between my mother and myself!' cried Flaubert.

"Nevertheless he admitted that he was madly in love with this woman, so much so that on one occasion the violence of his passion almost led to his killing her; at the very moment that his hand was raised against her he suddenly anticipated mentally the scene of his trial. 'Yes, indeed,' he said, 'I actually heard the creaking of the benches in the Assize Court.'

"He added that one of his grandfathers married a Canadian, and truly Flaubert's violent outbursts at times suggest that he must have Red-Indian blood in his veins. . . .

"*March 3.*—We took a walk and went off to find Théophile Gautier. . . . The street in which he lives is composed of the most squalid countrified buildings, of courtyards swarming with poultry, fruit shops whose doors are ornamented with little brooms of black feathers; just such a suburban street as Hervier might have painted. . . . We pushed open the door of a house, and found ourselves in the presence of the lord of epithet. The furniture was of gilded wood, covered with red damask, after the heavy Venetian style; there were fine old pictures of the Italian

school; above the chimney a mirror innocent of quicksilver, on which were scraped coloured arabesques and various Persian characters, such a mixture of meagre sumptuousness and faded splendour as one would find in the rooms of a retired actress, who had come in for some pictures through the bankruptcy of an Italian manager.

“When we asked him if we were disturbing him he answered, ‘Not at all. I never work at home. I get through my “copy” at the printing-office. They set up the type as I write. The smell of the printers’ ink is a sure stimulant to work, for one feels the “copy” must be handed in. I could write only a novel in this way now; unless I saw ten lines printed I could not get on to the next ten. The proof-sheet serves as a test to one’s work. That which is already done becomes impersonal, but the actual “copy” is part of yourself; it hangs like filaments from the root of your literary life, and has not yet been torn away. I have always been preparing corners where I should do my work, but when installed there, I found I could do nothing. I must be in the midst of things, and can work only when a racket is going on about me; whereas, when I shut myself up for work, the solitude tells upon me and makes me sad.’

“From there Gautier got on to the subject of the *Queen of Sheba*. We admitted our infirmity, our physical incapacity of taking in musical sound, and indeed a military band is the highest musical enjoyment of which we are capable. Whereupon Gautier

said, 'Well, I'm delighted to hear that—I am just like you: I prefer silence to music. I do know bad music from good, because part of my life was spent with a singer, but both are quite indifferent to me.

"Still it is curious that all the literary men of our day feel the same about music. Balzac abhorred it, Hugo cannot endure it, Lamartine has a horror of it. There are only a few painters who have a taste for it.'

"Then Gautier fell to complaining of the times: 'Perhaps I am getting an old man, but I begin to feel as if there were no more air to breathe. What is the use of wings if there is no air in which one can soar. I no longer feel as if I belonged to the present generation. Yes, 1830 was a glorious epoch, but I was too young by two or three years—I was not carried away by the current—I was not ready for it. I ought to have produced very different sort of work.'

"There was then some talk of Flaubert, of his literary methods, of his indefatigable patience, and of the seven years he devoted to a work of four hundred pages. 'Just listen,' observed Gautier, 'to what Flaubert said to me the other day: "It is finished. I have only ten more pages to write; but the ends of my sentences are all in my head." So that he already hears in anticipation the music of the last words in his sentences before the sentences themselves have been written. Was it not a quaint expression to use!'

"I believe he has devised a sort of literary rhythm. For instance, a phrase which begins in slow measure must not finish with a quick pace, unless some special effect is to be produced. Sometimes the rhythm is only apparent to himself and escapes our notice.

"A story is not written for the purpose of being read aloud: yet he shouts his to himself as he writes them. These shouts present to his own ears harmonies, but his readers seem unaware of them.

"Gautier's daughters have a charm of their own, a species of Oriental languor, deep dreamy eyes, veiled by heavy eyelids, and a regularity in their gestures and movements which they inherit from their father; but this regularity is tempered in them by womanly grace. There is a charm about them which is not all French; nevertheless, there is a French element about it, their little tom-boyish tricks and expressions, their habit of pouting, the shrugging of their shoulders, the irony which escapes through the thin veil of childishness intended to conceal it. All these points distinguish them from ordinary society girls, and make clear a strong individuality of character which renders them fearless in expressing their likings and antipathies. They display liberty of speech, and have often the manner of a woman whose face is hidden by a mask; and yet one finds here simplicity, candour, and a charming absence of reserve, utterly unknown to the ordinary young girl."

Théophile Gautier's daughters at the time these

lines were written were still children, the eldest, Judith, having been born in 1850. The great journalist was devoted to his children, and they were most highly educated. Judith Gautier is to this day one of the chief authorities on Chinese and Eastern literature in Europe.

“Flaubert was seated on a divan, his legs crossed in Turkish fashion. He spoke of his plans, his ambition, and of his dream novels. He confided to us the secret desire he has long cherished to write a work on modern Eastern life. He imagines the East as a world whose former bright colour has given way to something sombre and mysterious. He revels in the possibilities of all the antitheses which his talent would present in the projected volume. He would begin by describing a scene in Paris, and then take his readers off to Constantinople and on to the Nile, alternating between scenes of European hypocrisy, and those scenes of horror, such as drowning and decapitation for a suspected crime without any form of trial, enacted in the far-off countries of the East.

“Flaubert became quite merry over the pictures of cosmopolitan ‘*canaille*,’ which he proposes to make gravitate around his hero; and he discoursed at length on the curious contrasts which would be presented, were Eastern nations suddenly under the immediate influence of civilisation, and were the peoples of Europe to return to a state of barbarism. From this book, of which only the outline is in his brain, Flaubert passed on to another, of which he has



cherished the idea for some time—a vast romance, a huge picture of life, in which the various episodes which go to make existence would all be related to one main action. He also spoke of writing one or two little stories innocent of special incidents, and dealing with the eternal problems of the wife, the husband, and the lover!

“In the evening, after dinner, we made our way to Théophile Gautier, who was still dining, though it was nine o'clock. . . . Gautier displayed the merri-ment of a child, one of the chief charms of true intellectual worth.

“They rose from table and we all passed into the drawing-room, . . . whereupon there was a general request that Flaubert would dance the ‘step of the drawing-room idiot.’ He borrowed a coat, turned up the collar, I cannot say what he did to his hair, his face, and indeed his whole appearance, but suddenly he seemed transformed into a formidable caricature of imbecility. Gautier, filled with a wild desire to follow suit, took off his coat, and with beads of perspiration standing on his forehead, began to tread with heavy steps the ‘Measure of the Creditor,’ and the evening was brought to a close with Bohemian songs and strange wild melodies, contributed now and again by Prince R——.”

The following description of the brothers' first visit to George Sand must not be accepted as their final judgment on the famous writer; for later they

became very warmly attached to the authoress of *Consuelo* :—

“ *March 30.*—On the fourth floor of No. 2 Rue Racine, a little commonplace man opened the door, and said smilingly, ‘Messieurs de Goncourt?’ and pushed open a door; we found ourselves in a large room, a sort of studio.

“We were at first only conscious of a grey shadow near the window, standing out from the dim twilight which was stealing into the room; then we descried the form of a woman, who remained motionless without returning our greeting by look or sign. This shadow was Madame Sand, and the man who had just shown us in was the engraver Marceau. Madame Sand had the aspect of an automaton: she speaks in a monotonous and mechanical voice, with no inflection of tone, and not a vestige of excitement. There was something grave and placid in her attitude. . . . Her gestures are as slow and deliberate as those of a somnambulist. Suddenly she struck a wax match, and we saw the lighted end of a cigarette gleaming from the woman’s lips.

“Madame Sand was very amiable and full of praise of our work, but with a childish paucity of ideas, a platitude of expression, and a dull good-nature, which struck our hearts as chillily as the damp bareness of a wall. Marceau made an effort to bring a touch of brightness into the conversation. We spoke of her theatre at Nohant, where there are performances for the special benefit of herself and her

maid till four o'clock in the morning. Then we alluded to her prodigious capacity for work, upon which she assured us that there was no *merit* in her power of work, because it has always been easy to her. She works all night, that is, from one to four in the morning, and again for two hours during the day: Marceau, who played the *rôle* of showman, added, 'She does not mind in the least if she is disturbed. If you have a tap running in your room, and any one comes in, you turn it off: it is just what occurs with Madame Sand.' . . .

"When we took leave of her, she rose, gave us her hand, and accompanied us to the door. There we were able to see a little of her good, calm, and gentle face; the colour has died out, but the features are delicately marked in the pale light of her countenance. None of her portraits have done justice to this delicacy of outline. . . ."

"You would never guess on what bed Béranger breathed his last. He died on the jointed couch on which the Empress gave birth to the Prince Imperial, and which was offered by the Tuileries to soften the last agony of him who had sung so faithfully and sweetly the glories of the great Napoleon."

## CHAPTER XII

The illness and death of Rose, the de Goncourts' old servant—The prototype of "Germinie Lacerteux"—Letters to Paul de Saint-Victor—An evening with the Gautiers.

IN the July of this year Jules and Edmond de Goncourt suffered a loss by death, which had upon them a singular and lasting effect. For five-and-twenty years they had been served, cherished, and nursed in illness by a woman to whom they were attached with an almost filial respect, their mother's servant Rose. After a violent pleurisy she had been attacked by disease of the lungs, and Jules notes day by day the progress of the malady, expressing with touching insight that change which sometimes, though not always, precedes the end. "She has no more the same appearance, the same gestures, and it seems to me that she daily puts off somewhat of that indefinable element which expresses a living personality. Before killing outright, disease brings in the strange, the unknown, the something which is not your friend, creates a sort of other creature, in the midst of which you must seek that which you have known; the tenderness and animation which exist no more."

"*July 31.*—I am waiting to hear from Dr. Simon

whether old Rose will live or die. I am listening for the ring of his bell, which is for me like the bell which announces the return of a jury into Court. . . . It is over, and there is no hope, it is only a question of time. How quickly she has got worse. And we must yet needs smile serenely." Rose was nursed in the room to which she was accustomed, a small *chambre de domestique*, where the doctor, taking off his hat, was perforce obliged to lay it on the bed. The brothers determined to remove her to the fine new Hospital of Lariboisière, built in separate pavilions, and combining every possible modern appliance. Jules writes in his diary how he himself took her in a cab, holding her in his arms upon a pillow; she had refused an ambulance. Arrived at the hospital, Rose insisted on walking into the great hall, where Jules delivered her into the charge of a nurse. He kissed her and went away. Three days later both the brothers returned to the Lariboisière, and found Rose talking quietly of the time when she would return home—in three weeks at latest.

"Next Rose's bed is that of a young woman, whose husband, a workman, came to see her, and to whom she said, 'As soon as I can walk I shall go up and down in the garden so often that they will feel obliged to send me home!' And she added, 'Does the child sometimes ask after me?' 'Sometimes; now and again,' replied the workman."

On Saturday, the 16th, Rose died, and a messenger came from the hospital at ten in the morning,

to tell the brothers that they were practically a second time orphaned.

"What a blank in our home!" writes Jules. "We had felt an affection for her which had lasted twenty-five years. The whole of our life was known to her; she opened our letters during our absence, and we told her all about ourselves. When I was a child we howled our hoops together, and she bought apple puffs for me with her own money when we went out walking. She waited up for Edmond till the early morning to let him in when he went secretly to the opera ball. She was the admirable nurse in whose hands my mother placed ours on her dying bed.

"She had charge of the keys, and was responsible for everything that went on; for five-and-twenty years she had tucked us up in bed, and every evening she allowed us to crack the same eternal old jokes about her ugliness and deformity.

"And we shall never see her again! Another will move about the flat, another will wish us good-day, another will be in her place in the morning. It is a terrible wrench, a terrible change in our life. It is one of those solemn breaks in life where, to use Byron's expression, 'the Fates change horses.'"

It may be imagined that neither Jules nor Edmond had the courage to look upon their dead nurse; but they made themselves miserable at the thought that she had died alone, perhaps in prolonged pain. They were greatly comforted to learn that

the end had come quickly. This was told to them by a kind little nun, with "a tender ugly countenance." And they buried Rose at the Cemetery of Montmartre, with psalms and prayers, and then returned to their empty house.

Five days later came the sad awakening.

"In the midst of a dinner, saddened by talk which reverted to the dead woman, Maria, who had come in that evening, burst out, 'My friends, as long as the poor woman lived I kept the secret. But now she is under the earth, I shall tell you the truth.' And we learnt about the unhappy one things which took away our appetite. The whole of an odious, repugnant, and lamentable existence was revealed to us. Promises to pay which she had signed, debts which she had left to all the tradespeople, the most unexpected, the most astounding, the most inconceivable depths of deception." Nor were pecuniary deficits the worst of the revelations. The wretched woman had led two separate lives,—tormented by the fear of hell on the one side, and on the other by the horrible danger in which she stood relative to her young masters; dreading an angry creditor, an anonymous letter; and at last, after years of deception, she broke down and died from the direct effect of one of her wild excursions—Rose had been indeed a living lie.

It may be said that the de Goncourts never recovered from the shock. The associations surrounding their home and their dead mother had remained with the two young Parisians as the memory and

the witness of a better world than that in which they dwelt. Rose, whom they had loved and trusted with the kind of tender household romance, of which all Frenchmen are capable, poisoned for them the very fountains of their youth. They never thought so well of women again.

But the novel, *Germinie Lacerteux*, which was to immortalise poor Rose's ill-fated death, was not written till two years later.

*To Paul de Saint-Victor, probably from  
Bar-sur-Seine.*

"A June Day, 1862.

" . . . Life here goes the same little round day after day in turnspit fashion. A relation, ironically bestowed on us by Providence, does nothing but sing snatches of Béranger's songs. I take my revenge on him by styling his music a *table-d'hôte* dessert !

"I smoke my pipe in a shed where there is a horse and a swallow's nest, full of little beaks waiting for the food so faithfully brought them by their parents. The scene reminds one both of Gericault's studies and a page of Michelet. Soon I will write to you in our boat, and enclose a willow leaf fallen on the paper as a slight touch of nature ! And Claire ? Edmond is glad to hear of any new words added to her repertory. I seem to see her before me in her perambulator, with the sunlight streaming over the road, the little cheeks and the eyes of her papa.



What a pretty picture you two would make, happiness harnessed to joy! So don't forget to give us news of her, and my best remembrance to the mamma. . . ."

*To the same, a few days later.*

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—Last night I dreamed of Mademoiselle Claire. She was a perfect love, and talked as plainly as would have done a little girl of ten. She did nothing but kiss her big godfather and me. Perhaps this is how little folk communicate with their friends; they send them dream kisses during the night. . . . Yes, I quite agree with you, there is something of Shakspeare in Marivaux; a breath of 'As You Like It' seems to pass through the brocaded skirts of his heroines. It is a strange thing, but the two most French poets of that ideally French eighteenth century, Marivaux and Watteau, possess something of the grace, lightness, purity, and beauty of the great master."

The brothers returned to Paris early in August.

"August 31.—We received, a few days ago, a little printed sheet, upon which we found the following: 'Gentlemen, you are requested to take part in a small family gathering, which will be held at Neuilly, 32 Rue de Longchamps, on the 31st of August, 1862.'

"We responded to this invitation, and found

ourselves in Rue de Longchamps amongst twenty-five or thirty guests. The dramatic performance was to take place in Mesdemoiselles Gautier's room. There were a stage, a curtain, and footlights, to say nothing of all the arm-chairs and seats in the house; the mantelpiece served as balcony stall. Over the door was stuck the play-bill.

"THEATRE DE NEUILLY,  
Pierrot Posthume.

"The canvas rose on a scene painted by Puvis de Chavannes. . . . The whole Gautier family composed the dramatis personæ; Judith, in the Esmeralda costume of Italian comedy, displayed a languid grace; little Estelle, looking very slight in her harlequin costume, her little dark face sparkling with childish glee; Gautier's son appeared as a somewhat passionless Pierrot, and, if one can use the expression, seemed a trifle too 'posthume.' Then Gautier, as the doctor, was a truly marvellous Pantaloon, so painted, rouged, and bedaubed that he would have frightened away all the diseases enumerated by Diafoirus, with bent back and wooden gesture, fetching his voice from the unknown region of his body, a voice not his own but hoarse, of falsetto effect, which might well be that of a cackling Rabelais."

## CHAPTER XIII

A meeting with Sainte-Beuve—Conversation with the author of *Volupté*  
—The Magny dinners—Publication of *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ième</sup>*  
*Siècle*—Princess Mathilde Bonaparte—Robespierre as poet—1863—  
Jules de Goncourt's love of children—Turgueniev—A visit to  
Montalembert—Madame Sand at Nohant—Flaubert's Norman  
home—A call on M. and Mme. Michelet.

DURING the November of this year the de Goncourts renewed their acquaintance with the critic, Sainte-Beuve, then at the height of his literary fame and power; and although he must have been in many ways strangely out of sympathy with the enthusiasms and aims of the two brothers, he became intimate with them, and was the means of their making many valuable acquaintances.

“*November 8.*—We dined with Gavarni.

“ . . . The author of *Volupté* (Sainte-Beuve) arrived in a costume which might be that of a little country shopkeeper out on the spree; he took from his pocket a black silk skull-cap, and proceeded to put it on, in view of possible draughts. I mentioned his articles in the *Constitutionnel*. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I hope to go on during the next twenty months to the end of my agreement. I have a certain facility for passing from one subject to

another, yet this is really the most trying part of my work. I lectured at Liège three times a week; I had a course for four years at the "Primary" School. I gave twenty-two lectures on Bossuet. On these occasions I give out all I know. I turn my notes inside out, I empty my bag, and even though I come to the last of my cartridges, I still let them off. To tell the truth, I am worn out, or rather disgusted. All these insults and calumnies for a wretched little honour unworthy the name—and which is notwithstanding so mightily prized.'"

This is in allusion to a newspaper, which, in an article announcing that the critic had received an invitation to one of the Compiègne country parties, accused him of treachery to a friend.

The conversation turned on the eighteenth century. "It is the time about which I care most," cried Sainte-Beuve. "To my mind there was never a finer period than that of the first fifteen years of the reign of Louis XIV. What men there were then! Even those not of the first intellectual rank, Rivavol, Chamfort: do you remember the clever *mot* of the former? 'Blasphemy is an indiscretion.' Hum, hum."

This habit of hemming and hawing has become quite characteristic of Sainte-Beuve, and serves to connect the expression of his thoughts. "Hum, hu'i" he repeated constantly, and then went on again.

"And all the talkers of that day possessed a philo-

sophy with which we should do well to imbue ourselves. There was no question of the immortality of the soul, and subjects of that kind; one lived in the best way one could, doing good, and not despising the material. Now we take too much religion, too strong a dose of it. Besides, in those days they had real society—society, which is, after all, man's best invention."

He then passed on to Michelet, of whom he spoke with animosity and vindictiveness. "To-day, his style may be termed vertical; he no longer puts in any verbs. But he is a god and has his devotees. His first volumes are no better than the rest, and the last are only tolerated for the sake of the first."

The great charm of Sainte-Beuve's conversation lies in his extremely delicate mode of touching on his subjects. "You find no loftiness of style, no grandeur of expression, none of those striking images which call up a mental picture. His sentences are sharp and polished, and he passes rapidly from one subject to another: his conversation at times resembles a fine rain of words, giving minute and lengthy descriptions by means of super-position: ingenious, witty, but superficial, it is full of grace, and sparkles with epigram."

The good impression seems to have been mutual, for a few days later Sainte-Beuve wrote to Jules de Goncourt for the advance sheets of the brothers' forthcoming work, *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ième</sup> Siècle*, in order that he might review it in the *Constitutionnel*.

On the 22nd of November took place the first of the fortnightly literary dinners, destined to become so famous, in the Restaurant Magny, a comparatively humble little eating-house in the Rue Contrescarpe.

Gavarni and Sainte-Beuve together founded the Magny dinners, which, originally organised with a view to bringing together a few friends at regular intervals, soon grew into important gatherings, in which took part successively Gautier, Flaubert, George Sand, Renan, Taine, and Zola. Now and again a distinguished "outsider," Turgueniev, for instance, was bidden to a Magny dinner, but some half-dozen men of letters, among whom were the de Goncourts, formed the staple of the company.

According to their invariable habit, much of the talk which went on round *la table de Magny* was recorded by the brothers in their diary, and this led, as will be seen later, to a serious breach between M. Edmond de Goncourt and Ernest Renan.

During the late autumn of 1862 the de Goncourts published *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*. This volume was intended to form part of a larger history of the epoch to be brought out in four volumes: *Man*, *Woman*, *The State*, and *Paris*. Only one volume saw the light, and Sainte-Beuve paid *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle* the compliment of making it the subject of two successive *Lundis*.

Leaving on one side the often-repeated anecdotes





EDMOND DE GONCOURT

*Bust by Lenoir, 1890*





and descriptions which are copied from one historian by another, the brothers had taken the most minute pains to find and make use of any autograph letters, pamphlets, almanacs, drawings, paintings, relics, handbills, which could throw a light on the social domestic life of the French woman of the eighteenth century. The book was dedicated to Paul de Saint-Victor, who, reviewing it in the *Presse*, noticed the extraordinary change which had come over the outward aspect of the feminine world. "History makes and re-makes women in its own images. In a correct speech she sculptures classic divinities out of a single block: in more free and easy times she chisels out little fantastic statuettes. Look at the women of Louis XIV.'s reign. Their symmetrical beauty seems to illustrate the rule of the Three Unities: they possess large noses, broad foreheads, striking features, ample figures. Under the Regency, faces are rounder, noses smaller, chins more delicately prominent, the fashions of the day giving the women a doll-like appearance."

The authors carry their readers up to the edge of the Revolution, after which, the domination of *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle* (meaning the woman of the upper classes), came to an end. "The patches slipt off the cheek, the sparkling glances faded, and the Watteau fans were folded for evermore."

Of the women of the middle classes, the *bourgeoises* of the eighteenth century, the de Goncourts give a more serious picture, and prove the extraordinary

industry and research the writers must have brought to bear on all their historical studies: no indication was too slight, no clue too difficult to follow, if there was hope of adding to their knowledge of the subject they were treating; and, as Michelet once observed, out of the de Goncourts' historical works might have been built up several reputations.

"*November 27.*—In these days it is not enough to write a book, you must make yourself its servant, run about after it, and constitute yourself, so to speak, the lackey of its success. I carry my books here and there, to some who will only half cut them, to others who will speak of them without reading them, or who will exchange them at a second-hand bookseller's for the price of a dinner. . . . How curious a physiology could be constructed from men of letters if they were judged by the appearance of their house-porter, of their staircase, of their door-bell, and of their home. Generally I have noticed in almost all cases a sort of logical link and intimate correlation between the shell and its inhabitant—between the man and his surroundings. The man of letters generally lodges at the top of the house, on the fifth floor. You will find the brain of Paris lodged, as it is in men, in the upper regions, the legs or instruments of movement are found in the *entresol* . . . and the organs of digestion on the first floor: a house is like a human being.

"*December 1.* We went to thank *Sainte-Beuve*

for his article. . . . He lives in the Rue Montparnasse. The narrow door was opened to us by his housekeeper. We were shown up into his bedroom, which, with its great bookcases, curtainless windows, and paper-laden table might be that of a Benedictine monk thrown by fate into a common lodging-house. . . .

"*December* 3.—I received, with a charming note full of compliments on our work, an invitation to dinner from Princess Mathilde.

"We were shown into a round drawing-room, hung with panels of purple silk. Gavarni, Chennévières, and Nieuwerkerke had already arrived, and then the Princess appeared with her reader, Madame de Fly. We sat down, seven in number, to table, and but for the gold plate engraved with the Imperial arms, and the gravity and impassive demeanour of the footmen, one would scarcely have imagined oneself to be in the presence of royalty, for in this agreeable house there is complete liberty of mind and speech.

"Princess Mathilde's *salon* is essentially the true *salon* of the nineteenth century . . . with a hostess who is a perfect type of the modern woman of the world. A woman as kindly as her smile—the broad sweet smile of an Italian mouth—and possessing, by virtue of her natural mode of speech, her bright vivacious tones, and her adorable simplicity, the art of at once putting you at ease.

"To-day, among all these men, she was delightfully simple and charming, bemoaning in a pretty,

witty fashion the level to which women have sunk since the eighteenth century, and the annoyance she experiences in finding so few of her sex taking any interest in art, or in the newer literature. She declared she can rarely converse with the women she meets. 'If one of my own sex were to come in now, I should be forced to change the conversation: presently you will see that for yourselves. I am willing to receive all the intelligent women of the day . . . I would have gladly received Mdlle. Rachel, and I will invite Madame Sand whenever you please!'"

Few of the women of our time have led so strangely chequered a life as has Princess Mathilde. The only daughter of the King of Westphalia (Jerome Bonaparte) and Caroline of Würtemberg, she is allied through her mother with most of the reigning Royal houses in Europe, and may be said to be the only member of the Bonaparte family who has retained the permanent liking and respect of the French nation.

She married, at the age of one-and-twenty, Prince Demidoff, a wealthy Russian nobleman, but after four years of far from happy union, the husband and wife agreed to lead separate existences, the former in Russia, the latter in Paris, where her great beauty and rare mental power soon won her a considerable position in the social and intellectual world.

Princess Mathilde from childhood cherished a deep affection and veneration for the great chief of her

father's family ; she has never forgotten she was *née Bonaparte*, and when Louis Napoleon, in 1848, was elected Prince President, he found his cousin more than willing to throw her influence, which was even then considerable, on his side, and until his marriage to Mademoiselle Eugenie de Montijo, she acted as the virtual mistress of his successive presidential and imperial establishments.

Since the year 1847, when she first took up her residence in France, Princess Mathilde has been the centre of an unique literary and artistic society, and has never allowed political or religious creeds to interfere with her many intellectual friendships, with two notable exceptions ; her breach with Sainte-Beuve, and her quarrel with Taine, for she never forgave the latter his one leaflet on Napoleon I.

The publication, after his death, of her correspondence with Sainte-Beuve—*Lettres de la Princesse*—gave rise to considerable comment, for what had occurred was well known to the French world of journalism and letters ; but of his quondam royal friend the critic left an imperishable description :—  
“ *La physionomie entière exprime noblesse et dignité, et dès qu'elle s'anime, la grace unie à la force, la joie qui naît d'une nature saine, la franchise et la bonté.*”

Princess Mathilde used to be called by de Morny “the man of the family ;” and she retained to the end of his life a great influence over Napoleon III. She spent the year 1871 in Belgium, only leaving Paris after the historic 4th of September, and driving

openly out of the city *en Altesse*. After a short exile she once more returned to Paris and took up the broken threads of her old life.

At Saint Gratien, the fine château which has been for the last forty-five years her country house, Princess Mathilde has entertained generations of artistic and literary personalities, since the far-off days when she first made the acquaintance of the authors of *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*. Edmond de Goncourt is now one of her oldest and most valued friends: together they have seen many great reputations rise and disappear, and of the brilliant circle gathered round the Princess in 1862, perhaps he alone remains to remind her of the days when she was not the least important member of a great dynasty, and when her womanly tact and charm acted as a restraining hand on many who might have otherwise adopted Victor Hugo's attitude to the Third Empire.

“*December*.—A Saturday Magny Dinner. Sainte-Beuve once knew at Boulogne an old librarian named Isnard, who had been professor of rhetoric in the Oratorian school at Arras. Robespierre had been his pupil, and he used to tell of how the latter, having become a briefless barrister, and time hanging heavy on his hands, had taken to writing poetry. His first literary effort concerned ‘The art of spitting, and of blowing one’s nose;’ but Robespierre’s sister, fearing lest the publication of this poem should lose him what small practice he had, sought out Isnard, and

consulted him as to the means of delaying the publication. Accordingly, Isnard asked Robespierre to read him the poem, and observed, 'Good, very good indeed, but you must polish, you must polish.'

"Finally the Revolution bore off Robespierre from this same polishing, and the poem was never published."

"*January 1, 1863.*—To-day we are feeling sad at heart, added to which is the humiliation of dining at a restaurant. There are days in the year when, at six o'clock precisely, the possession of a family seems desirable. . . ."

Perhaps in order to fill up this void, Jules, whose great love of children constantly peeps out in his correspondence, spent a portion of his New Year evening in writing to a small playfellow, who must have treasured up the long epistle with care, for thirty-one years have come and gone since the following was written to Mademoiselle Juliette Marcille :—

"PARIS, *January 1, 1863.*

"MY DEAR MADEMOISELLE JULIETTE,—Do you remember how kind you were to me when I came to see you in your country home? I hope you have not forgotten me. It is true that when you came to see me with your uncle, I thought you seemed somewhat indifferent, for you disappeared into the dining-room to play with the lamp shade, notwithstanding the fact that you might have thus dirtied your



little hands. But after you had gone it occurred to me that as men of letters do not always shave, I may have seemed less good-looking than usual. If this was the case, please forgive me, and accept as a peace-offering the contents of the hamper which I am sending you.

"I have for your sake spent the whole day haunting all the penny-toy booths. I feel sure you are too kind to wish to keep everything I am sending you for yourself, so share the collection with your sisters, and even allow your mamma to choose any little thing she might find useful in the house. There is, however, one thing I should like you to keep, that is, a volume of stories written by my friend, M. de Chennevières, for his children.

"I beg you to receive, together with the hamper, dearest little lady, the expression of my devotion and sympathy, and I beg of you to always consider me your very humble servant and playfellow,

"JULES DE GONCOURT.

"*P.S.*—My brother, who is older and more reasonable than I am, begs to be remembered to you.

"*P.P.S.*—Do not tell your parents; but all the toys I have sent you are made to be broken."

"*January 17.*—Sainte-Beuve told us something of his recollections of Madame Récamier, and sketched one of the figures who haunted her salon—old Forbin-Janson. He would be met on the staircase,

carried by a servant and looking like a shadowy ruin, a man at his last gasp; but as soon as the door opened, and the maid appeared, just as if some spring had been touched, a smile suddenly illuminated his face, and he entered the room with quite a grand air, bowing gallantly, and coming out now and again with some fairly witty sally, to which Madame Récamier would call attention.

"He then passed on to Ampère, of whom he saw a great deal, and who came to pay him a visit almost every morning, at a time when he himself, seized with a fit of hatred towards society, had immured himself in the Hotel du Commerce. He represented Ampère in his various capacities, as the 'cavaliere servante' of Madame Récamier, as the classical 'patito,' the typical academic showman, and as the guide of would-be literary women. . . .

"*January 26.*—Flaubert told me lately the story of how his maternal grandfather escaped the guillotine. The worthy old man was a country doctor, and when shown in an inn an account of the execution of Louis XVI., could not help weeping; he was just about to be sent off to the Revolutionary Tribunal, when he was saved by his seven-year-old son, whose quick-witted mother had taught him to recite a pathetic, and it is to be supposed republican discourse, which was listened to with great satisfaction by the authorities. . . .

"*February 9.*—Yesterday we were in the Princess Mathilde's *salon*; to-day we went to a popular ball at 'L'Elysée des Arts,' on the Boulevard Bourbon.

I love these contrasts ; one sees thus all the various stories which build up the edifice of society. . . .

“ *February 14.*—Our Saturday dinners are really delightful. The talk leaps from one thing to another, and each contributes his quota.

“ Victor Hugo’s name was suddenly flung into the conversation. No sooner was it pronounced than Sainte-Beuve started as if he had been bitten by some animal under the table, and declared that Hugo is a charlatan, the first man who speculated in literature. Whereupon Flaubert observed that he is the only man in whose skin he would gladly find himself. ‘No, no,’ answered Sainte-Beuve, justly enough, ‘one would never wish to give up one’s own personality—one might desire to appropriate certain qualities belonging to another, but only while remaining one’s own individual self.’

“ Then he softened, and admitted the great initiative power possessed by Victor Hugo. ‘Yes,’ he added, ‘it is he who first taught me to write verse, and one day in the Louvre he instructed me on the subject of painting, and taught me all that I have since forgotten. . . . He has a marvellous temperament, has Hugo. His barber once told me that the hair of his head was three times as strong as that of any other man, and blunted all the razors. He has the teeth of a wolf, teeth which could crush peach stones. And what eyes ! Why, when he was writing his *Feuilles d’Automne*, we used to go up the towers of Notre Dame each evening to see the

sunset; well, from that height he could distinguish the colour of Madame Nodier's dress, when she was sitting on the balcony of the Arsenal.' . . .

"*February* 23.—Magny Dinner. Charles Edmond brought Turgueniev, the author of 'A Russian Hamlet,' a writer of delicate talent.

"He is a charming colossus, a gentle white-haired giant, who looks as if he were the good genie of some mountain or forest. He is strikingly handsome, with deep sky-blue eyes, and his speech possesses all the charm of the Russian accent, an accent which has about it a touch of both baby and nigger language.

"Touched and reassured by the ovation he received, he began to tell us many strange things about Russian literature, which he declared to be on the high road to realism—both the novel and drama. He informed us that Russians are great magazine readers, and confessed shamefacedly that he and some ten others are paid at the rate of 600 francs (£24) the serial chapter. On the other hand, novels in volume form are ill paid, each bringing in at the utmost 4000 francs (£160).

"On hearing Turgueniev mention the name of Henri Heine, we all declared our admiration for the German poet, but Sainte-Beuve, who said he knew him well, cried out that he was a good-for-nothing wretch, and a rogue. In response to the general 'tolle,' he hid his face in his hands till our eulogium was over. . . .

"A witty saying of old Rothschild's. Calvet

Rognat asked him what had caused the late fall in Government securities?

“‘How should I know? if I could only explain the reason of these fluctuations, I should have made my fortune long ago.’

“*April 29.*—M. de Montalembert wrote to ask us to come and talk with him about our book on *La Femme au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> Siècle*.

“On the table of the drawing-room was an Italian translation of the biography of Père Lacordaire, the fables of Comte Anatole de Ségur, and under the copy of Perugino’s Marriage of the Virgin, which hung over the piano, was an arrangement for burning a lamp or a taper. There were also on the walls designs for painted windows, and a horrible high relief of Saint Elizabeth and the Miracle of the Roses, whilst against the light between the windows appeared the Eagle of Poland, embroidered in embossed silks, surrounded by a crown of thorns upon a background of amaranth-coloured plush, and surmounted by the words, ‘Offered by the Ladies of Great Poland to the author of “A Nation in Mourning,” 1861.’

“M. de Montalembert took us into his private study with smooth civility. In giving us his hand he drew it to his heart. His voice, as I think we said before, is slightly nasal, but the speech is easy, the diction witty, and the malice extremely playful.

“After paying us some compliments on our work, he asked us why we have not touched on provincial

virtues, and dealt with the social life of the province, of that special, clearly defined, characteristic life, chiefly led formerly in Parliamentary towns such as Dijon, but now completely extinct. 'Yes,' he went on to say, 'the province no longer sends for books to Paris; nobody reads; when neighbours come to visit me in the country, I give them books, but nobody opens them.' Then he spoke to us about Sainte-Beuve's article upon our book, and told us that in this very room Sainte-Beuve often came to talk with him in 1848, confessing that it was with a view of studying him—Montalembert,—and asking him how he managed his speeches in public. Sainte-Beuve then took note of the conversation, rubbing his hands gaily together. 'I have known Sainte-Beuve in many phases—first as an idolater of Hugo at home, writing there his best verses, verses dedicated to Madame Hugo; then as a Saint Simonian; then as a mystic apparently upon the verge of becoming Christian, and now as *very bad*. Do you know that the other day at the Academy, apropos of the dictionary, he had the audacity to say, touching his forehead, "Now really, do you think that we have inside here anything else than a secretion of the brain?" This is materialism pushed further than has yet been known except among some of the doctors. There is amongst us rationalism and scepticism, but pure materialism no longer existed a few years ago. And lately, apropos of the prize of 20,000 francs, and the discussion about Madame Sand, did not Sainte-Beuve say that marriage was

a condemned institution, and would soon be put an end to ?'

"*March 11th.*—The Magny Dinner. We were all present, with two new guests, Gautier and Neftzer, our visitors.

"The conversation turned on Balzac. Sainte-Beuve attacked the great novelist. 'Balzac is not true to life; I admit he is a man of genius, but he is also a monster.'

"'Then are we all monsters?' cried Gautier. 'Who else has painted a picture of our own time? Where will you find such a reconstitution of society. If Balzac has not shown it to us, who has?'

"'I grant the imagination, the power of invention,' continued Sainte-Beuve bitterly. 'But where will you find truth to life? In the novels of Madame Sand?'

"'Well,' observed Renan, who was sitting next to me, 'I consider Madame Sand far more true to life than Balzac!'

"'No, really? Yes, she deals with natural passion.'

"'And then Balzac's style,' exclaimed Sainte-Beuve, 'it is a twisted and involved style.'

"'Gentlemen,' said Renan, 'in three hundred years Madame Sand will still be read.'

"'Balzac is already old-fashioned and so complex,' Saint-Victor continued.

"'But Hulot,' cried Neftzer, 'is so human, so superb.'

"'The beautiful is always simple. What could be

finer than the sentiments of Homer? They are everlastingly fresh and young. Andromache, for instance, will always be more interesting than Mme. Marneff!’

“‘Not to me,’ observed Edmond.

“‘What do you mean?’

“‘Your Homer only describes physical sufferings; it is much more difficult to depict those that are moral. I tell you frankly that the poorest psychological novel is of greater interest to me than all your Homer put together. I would rather read *Adolphe* than the *Iliad*.’

“‘One feels inclined to fling oneself out of the window when one hears such language,’ shouted Saint-Victor.

“His eyes looked as if they were coming out of his head, for his god has been blasphemed. He stamped his foot and roared out: ‘You are quite crazy. It is inconceivable. The Greeks are beyond discussion—all that relates to them is divine.’

“I remarked to my neighbour, ‘You may deny the existence of the Deity, you may discuss the Pope, spit out abuse of anything—but Homer!!! Truly these literary religions are hard to explain.’

“In time the storm subsided. Saint-Victor shook hands with Edmond, and dinner went on once more.

“Then what must Renan needs do but begin to explain that he is busy eradicating from his book every touch of the language of journalism, and that he is striving to write the French of the seventeenth century, according to the definite and fixed law



of language, which ought to suffice to express all feeling.

“‘You are wrong, and moreover you will never succeed,’ cried Gautier; ‘I will point out four hundred words in your book that are not of the seventeenth century. You feel the inspiration of new ideas, therefore these ideas must needs be clothed in new words! How about Saint Simon and Madame de Sévigné, do you believe that they wrote in the French of their day?’

“Gautier’s fluent speech drowned all. He continued: ‘I quite admit that in those times they had quite as many words as they required. They knew nothing; it is true they had a sprinkling of Latin, but no Greek; absolutely nothing of art. Did not they call Raphael the Mignard of his time? They knew nothing of history or of archæology! I defy you to compose the article I shall write Tuesday on Baudry with only seventeenth century words!’ . . .

*To Théophile Gautier.*

“April 28th, 1863.

“DEAR MASTER,—I have the honour of telling you that you were last evening elected unanimously a member of the Magny Dinners.

“Voters—Gavarni, Sainte-Beuve, Charles Edmond, Paul de Saint-Victor, Turgueniev, Taine, Baudry, E. Soulie, Edmond de Goncourt, Jules de Goncourt.

“Absent at the time of the vote—Renan, Dr. Veyne, De Chennevières, Comte de Nieuwerkerke.

"The dinners take place every fortnight, on Mondays. You will therefore be formally installed on Monday, May 11th (half-past six). A speech is not obligatory. J. DE GONCOURT."

"*June 8.*—After a violent discussion at Magny's, from which I have just emerged with beating heart and parched throat, I am fully convinced of the following: All political discussion comes to this, 'I am worth more than you are!' All literary discussion, 'I possess better taste than you!' All artistic discussion, 'I see more clearly than you do.' All musical discussion, 'I am gifted with a better ear than you can boast of.'

"It is rather alarming, nevertheless, to see how isolated we are in all controversy, and how few proselytes we make. It is perhaps for that reason that God made two of us.

"*June 22.*—The Magny Dinner.

"*Sainte-Beuve.*—'Madame Sand is soon about to deal with an interesting subject. She proposes to write something on a son of Rousseau, and his life during the Revolution. It will be written in a very generous tone. She is full of her subject, and has sent me during the last few days three letters on the subject.'

"*Soulie*: 'Why! there is a vaudeville of Théaulon on Rousseau's children.'

"*Renan*: 'Madame Sand is the greatest artist of our time, and possesses the truest talent.'

"The whole table—'Oh! ah! Oh! ah!'

"*Saint-Victor*: 'Is it not strange that she always writes on letter paper?'

"*Renan*: 'By *truth* I do not mean realism.'

"*Sainte-Beuve*: 'Let us drink. . . . Come, Scherer.' . . .

"*Taine*: 'Hugo is not sincere.'

"*Sainte-Beuve*: 'Can you, Taine, really place Musset above Hugo? Why, Hugo can write books. He achieved the greatest success of our day in spite of the present powerful Government—under its very nose. He has penetrated everywhere: women, the people, all the world read him; an edition of his work was exhausted in four hours. When I read his odes and ballads I carried all my verses to him. The *Globe* staff used to call him a barbarian. Well! all that I have done he made me do it. The *Globe* people had in ten years taught me nothing.'

"*Saint-Victor*: 'Yes, we are all his disciples.'

"*Taine*: 'Allow me: I do not doubt that Victor Hugo is an immense power, but——

"*Sainte-Beuve*, growing excited — 'Taine, you don't know Hugo. Gautier and I are the only ones here who do. His work is magnificent.'

"*Taine*: 'The fact is, that what you call poetry now-a-days means describing a belfry or a sky. . . . Now, I do not call this poetry, I call it painting.'

"*Gautier*: 'Taine, it strikes me you are pandering to bourgeois idiocy. Why do you insist on the sentimental side of poetry? Poetry consists of striking words—words that pass like flashes of light

and are clothed, not only with light, but with rhythm and music.' . . .

"*July 20.*—Magny Dinner.

"Apropos of the book 'Victor Hugo, related by a Witness of his Life,' Gautier maintained that it was not a red waistcoat, but a pink doublet, that he wore at the first performance of *Hernani*, and when the whole table laughed, he added, 'But it is a very important point. The scarlet waistcoat would have indicated a shade of Republican policy. Well, there was not a trace of that sort of thing. We were purely mediæval, all of us—Victor Hugo like the rest. No one would have understood what was meant by a Republican. Petrus Borel was the only one with any tendencies of the kind. We were all against the *Bourgeoisie*, and on the side of Marchangy. We represented the *machicoulis*—nothing more! Why! when I sang the praises of antiquity in my preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, I nearly caused a schism. Uncle Beuve, I admit, has always been Liberal, but Hugo at that time was on the side of Louis XVII. Yes, I repeat it, Louis XVII. The idea of telling *me* that Hugo was a Liberal, or thought of such rubbish in 1828. It was only later on that he went off into that sort of thing. Why, at heart Hugo is thoroughly mediæval; in Jersey his dwelling is full of coats of arms!'

"'Gautier,' said Sainte-Beuve, interrupting him, 'do you know how we spent the day of the first performance of *Hernani*? At two o'clock I went with Hugo, of whom I was the faithful Achates, to

the Theatre Français. We mounted to the very top, to the skylight, and from there saw the crowd file along—all the Hugo troupe. At one moment he was somewhat alarmed to see Lassailly pass by, as he had not given him a ticket. I reassured him, and said I would be responsible. Then we dined at Véfour—downstairs, I think it was—for at that time Hugo's face was not widely known.' . . ."

The brothers, who were hard at work on their new novel,\* spent part of the summer of 1863 at Gretz, a lonely village some miles from Fontainebleau, even then much frequented by artists, and where now and again Jules de Goncourt persuaded some Paris friends to join them for a few days.

*To Paul de Saint-Victor.*

"August 8, 1863.

"DEAR FRIEND,—Our not writing does not mean that we have forgotten you, but only that we hesitated to ask you to a village hostelry, where the bedrooms are not always innocent of fleas, where we eat in a whitewashed dining-room, where, in a word, everything is of the country countrified. However, I received your letter, so you shall be given the opportunity of tasting the delights of this place.

"This is how I have planned out our four days. We will spend two days here seeing the ruin (for

\* *Renee Mauperin.*

we have a ruin), the river, &c., and this side of the forest. Wednesday we will go to Fontainebleau, and drive to Barbizon, Bas-Préau, &c.

"Thursday we will go over the château.

"JULES DE GONCOURT.

"*P.S.*—I have just inquired whether there is a barber. There is one, but given the kind of place this is, I fancy he will shave you with a hard-boiled egg in your mouth."

"*August 17.*—We have returned from our intense solitude to the Magny Dinner with a certain satisfaction. Every one is talking of the late Eugène Delacroix, whom Saint-Victor describes eloquently as 'a man who looked like Tippoo Sahib's apothecary.'

"Suddenly the critic turned pale; we were thirteen at table—yes, thirteen. 'Bah!' said Gautier, 'only Christians count, and there are several atheists present!'

"But he and Saint-Victor sent for Magny's school-boy son to be fourteenth.

"*September 14.*—The Magny Dinner.

"There was to-day a battle royal round Thiers' History, and it must be confessed that we were unanimous in condemning him as an historian devoid of talent. Sainte-Beuve alone defended him. 'He is such a charming man. He has so much wit and persuasive power! He lets you into the secret of how he carries the Parliament with him, and

wins over a député!’ This is the form of argument, and the method of defence always adopted on all occasions by Sainte-Beuve. You have only to say to him, ‘Mirabeau was a traitor,’ and he replies, ‘Yes, but see how he loved Sophie!’ And then he will depict the passion felt by the traitor for his mistress. . . . He does this for everybody, and under any circumstance. . . .

“‘By-the-bye, Gautier, you have just come back from Nohant, from Madame Sand’s house. Is it amusing there?’

“‘About as lively as a Moravian monastery. I arrived in the evening. It is at some distance from the railway station, and my trunk fell into a bush. I went in by the farm through a number of savage dogs. I had dinner. The food is good, but they give one rather too much game and chicken, and this does not suit me. . . . Marchal the painter was there, Madame Calamatta, and Alexandre Dumas *filz*.’

“‘And what sort of life is lived at Nohant?’

“‘They lunch at ten. On the last stroke of the hour everybody sits down to table, and Madame Sand arrives with the air of a somnambulist, and remains in a state of lethargy throughout the meal. After lunch all adjourn to the garden, and then a game of bowls wakes up the hostess. She sits down and begins to chat. There generally follows a discussion on the question of the different pronunciation of words. . . .

“‘But never a word on the subject of the relation

of the sexes. I verily believe that if you made the slightest allusion to such a subject you would be thrown out of the house.

“‘ At three o’clock Madame Sand goes upstairs to her “copy” until six o’clock. Then dinner—a meal which is somewhat hurried, in order to leave Marie Caillot more time to enjoy herself. She is the servant, a “*Petite Fadette*” whom Madame Sand picked up in the neighbourhood to play certain rôles in her plays, and who joins us in the drawing-room of an evening.

“‘ After dinner Madame Sand plays Patience until midnight without uttering a word. The second day I announced that unless there was some literary conversation I should depart. Literature! The word seems to bring them all from another world! The only subject that interests them for the moment is mineralogy; each has his or her own hammer, and never goes out without it. To create a little diversion I announced that Rousseau was the worst writer of the French tongue, and this started a discussion with Madame Sand, which lasted until one in the morning.

“‘ All the same, Manceau takes care that she is provided with a forest of pens, a sea of blue ink, some cigarettes, Turkish tobacco, and ruled note-paper. You are perhaps aware that she sets to work afresh from twelve o’clock at night till four in the morning. I consider the following fact highly abnormal; she will finish a novel at one o’clock in the morning, and start straight away on another.



“‘It is a very comfortable house to stay in. All the waiting is done very quietly. A box with two openings is in the hall; one is for the letters of the house, the other for those which are to be posted. In the former you place a list of all you may require, with the number of your room and your name. For instance, I wanted a comb; I wrote on a slip of paper my name, Gautier, the number of my room, and the object I required. The next morning at six o'clock I was offered a selection of thirty combs.’”

“*September 27.*—A Magny Dinner.

“Speaking of de Vigny, Sainte-Beuve observed: ‘One can scarcely say if he was really noble—no one ever saw his family, doubtless he came of 1814 nobility; in that day one was not over particular. In Garrick’s correspondence, you come across a certain de Vigny, who asks him for a loan, but in truly noble fashion, as if he had singled him out to confer a favour upon him. It would be interesting to know whether our man was a descendant of his. He was quite ethereal, and had always been so. You never saw such a thing as a beef-steak in his house. If you left him at seven o'clock to go and dine, he would say “What! going away already?” He never grasped the realities of life—they never existed as far as he was concerned. His sayings were sometimes superb. One day when he was coming out of the Academy a friend told him that his speech had been somewhat

long. "But I don't feel tired," was de Vigny's reply. He was awkward, and never understood by what combination he had got into the "Academie." If ever he proposed a candidate for a prize, he invariably ruined the latter's chance of success.'

"From the dead poet Sainte-Beuve passed on to Paris salons, and described to us that of Madame de Circourt, which is very eclectic, and always crowded with all sorts and conditions of men and women. Then he spoke of the only two salons, those of the Princess Mathilde and Madame de Paiva, where you meet men of letters.

"Gautier broke in and described the latter lady's strange life and adventures. She was, according to him, the illegitimate daughter of Prince Constantine and of a Jewess, and from being a great beauty had been converted into a monster by an attack of smallpox. Every looking-glass in the house was veiled with crape, and the child grew up without knowing what she herself was like. She was married when little more than a child to a French tailor settled at Moscow. She ran away from him with Hertz, who finally abandoned her. Falling very ill in Paris she sent for Gautier and said to him, 'You see the state I am in; if I die there is no more to be said, if I live I mean to have some day the finest house in Paris.'

"*Monday, October 19.*—Three days spent at Oisème near Chartres, with the Camille Marcilles,

in a house which one quits with a touch of tender emotion. A villa, surmounted by a studio (much as if it were a chapel rising above a large building), implies that art dominates the life of the family. Upstairs our eyes are rejoiced by paintings of Prudhon, Chardin, Fragonard; below in the garden, and in every corner of the bright little house, the heart is enlivened by a cordial hospitality, and all the good, wholesome, honestly happy influences of a home governed by duty, and where children meet one at every turn.

"Oh! what pretty little girls, and what a pleasure to take them out walking, holding their tiny hands; and at night, when we went up to bed, the amusing collection of little boots at the nursery door, set in a row as if it were Christmas night; and in the morning, when entering the dining-room, the gay and touching sight of their little chairs, small, smaller, smallest, according to their ages, set among the seats of the big people.

"One day they made a charming picture. The children were packed into a little donkey-basket drawn by a poor old donkey, thumped by a village boy, whose blouse flew behind him in the wind. All laughed, shouted, jumped about; it was a cartful of happiness, and no painter there to place it on permanent record."

Before his health failed, Jules de Goncourt seems to have been, according to his contemporaries, gaiety personified. He kept up a constant correspondence

with several child friends, and the following letter, written by the four little girls of whom he has left so delightful a picture, gives us a glimpse of his sunny, kindly nature, and real love of children :—

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! What sadness ! what sadness ! We are sad ! Juliette is sad ! Marguerite is sad ! Naco is sad ! my Aunty is sad ! Clementine, Mirza, all are sad ! Indeed it is sadness—of the saddest !

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ No more hide-and-seek, no more blind-man's-buff, no more walks, no more sugar-plums, no more games of cards, no more tarts.

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ Silence everywhere, silence within, silence without ; silence in the fields, silence in the studio, silence at table, silence in the corridors, silence all along the line.

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ My uncle paints my father ; we are going to pay a visit to the Grandets ! We read a book of travels, *Loin de Paris* ; we are going to dine at Gourdez. We receive a visit from one curé ! from two curés ! from three curés !

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ In the morning we still pass before your door, softly, fearing lest you should still be asleep ! But at ten you are still sleeping, and at noon also, and in the evening also, and at night also, and then always and always !

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ In the daytime we do our lessons without doing them. For we always fancy we shall hear you, hear you crying out, ‘ Get to your desks, Mesdemoiselles, get to your desks ! ’ But alas, vain expectation ! And while we cock our ears, four ears, six ears, eight ears, the pen slips from our hands, the inkpot falls on to the floor, the copy-book follows the inkpot, and tears stream from our eyes.

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ At night the fricandeau is without charm and without mushrooms ! We pour out our own wine and water, we eat no more plum-pudding, we sit no more under the shade of the trees, we walk straight along by the side of the onion beds, and the spinach borders. Then, when we come in, we take up a mortally dull piece of tapestry, and we go to bed at eight o’clock !

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ The night is still worse. For it is dark, it is dark ! One tosses, one tumbles out of bed, one dreams of dictation, analysis, catechism, and chronology ; then all of a sudden one wakes up, having heard Mdlle. Berthe call out in a terrible voice, ‘ To your lessons, young ladies, to your lessons ! ’

“ Ah ! Monsieur Jules ! Ah ! Monsieur Jules !

“ Write to us, Monsieur Jules. Write to us all together. Write to each one of us in particular. Don’t forget our Punchinello (a Punchinello drawn

and engraved one rainy day, and which later on was placed as a frontispiece to Jules' etchings). Don't forget the game of cards (*le trente-et-un*). Don't forget Oisème (department of the Oise). Don't forget anything, don't forget everything. For all of us think of you, all of us speak of you, all of us love you, all of us regret your absence. All of us want you to come back. All of us embrace you.

"Ah! Monsieur Jules! Ah! Monsieur Jules! Your friends, for life,

"MARIE MARCILLE.

"JULIETTE MARCILLE.

"MARGUERITE MARCILLE.

"Fatty, I love you.—NACOTIER.

"OISEME, *Wednesday*."

Next a visit to Flaubert and his Norman home :—

"October 29.—Croisset, a pretty homestead situated half way up a hill on the banks of the Seine.

"Here we are at last in the study, which has been the silent witness of so much hard work, and which turned out *Madame Bovary* and *Salammbô*. . . . In a corner is the camp bed, covered with a piece of Turkish embroidery, and heaped up with cushions. In the middle of the room is the work table, a large round table covered with a green cloth—the ink-stand is in the form of a toad.

"Flaubert lives here with a niece, the daughter

of the woman whose bust was sculptured by Pradier. His mother, born in 1794, retains an old-world vitality, and in the features of the old lady you can still detect the remains of past beauty allied with the severe dignity of old age. There is a breath of provincial austerity about the house, and the young girl, who spends her life between a studious uncle and a grave grandmother, receives their guests with kindly words, a merry twinkle in her blue eyes, and a little pout of regret, when at eight o'clock grandmamma wishes her son good-night, and carries the girl off to her room.

"*November 1.*—We remained shut up in the house all day. Flaubert has a horror of all exercise, and his mother has positively to worry him to make him go down into the garden. She told us that when she returns from spending half a day in Rouen, she often finds her son sitting in the same place, and in the same position, as when she left him. He never makes any excursion into the outside world, he simply lives in his study buried in his work."

The autumn of 1863 may be said to have witnessed the beginning of the two de Goncourts' wider fame. Michelet, in the preface of his work on the Regency, alluded to them as follows:—"Two eminent and learned writers—I am thinking of the Messieurs de Goncourt;" and some idea of how little the brothers were used to this kind of recognition from their fellows will be gathered from the following letter:—

*To Michelet.*

"October 7, 1863.

"SIR,—We should like to be able to convey to you personally our thanks for the unexpected and unlooked-for honour you have done us in the preface of your *Régence*. No praise could have given us greater pleasure, and we beg of you to receive the expression of the gratitude, which we hope to be able to offer you in person on your return from the country.—We are, Sir, yours gratefully,

EDMOND AND JULES DE GONCOURT."

"November 23.—We have been to thank Michelet for the flattering lines he wrote about us.

"He lives in the Rue de l'Ouest, at the end of the Jardin du Luxembourg, in a large house which might almost be workmen's dwellings. His flat is on the third floor. A maid opened the door and announced us—we penetrated into a small study.

"The wife of the historian has a young, serious face; she was seated on a chair beside the desk on which the lamp was placed, with her back to the window. Michelet sat on a couch of green velvet, and was banked up by cushions.

"His attitude reminded us of his historical work; the lower portions of his body were in full sight, whilst the upper were half concealed; the face was a mere shadow surrounded with snowy white locks; from this shadowy mass emerged a profes-



